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Chroma

A QUEER LITERARY JOURNAL
Issue 8 - Winter 2009

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Oscar of Between

Betsy Warland

Oscar.

Inexplicably entering the Imperial War Museum. London. 30.3.07. Sodden gusting air (outside). Atmospheric twilight of Camouflage Exhibit (inside). Oscar, having quickly walked by bare-bulb of permanent collection (its secrets intact).

Oscar.

Last time traveled alone: 1992. Amsterdam. Wrote the Van Gogh suite:
“open wound of the ear.”

Oscar.

Now rummaging through satchel for ear-length pencil. On exhibition ticket scribbling quote from first display case:

“Art alone could screen men and intentions where natural cover failed.”

S.J. Solomon

British artist and camouflage officer

Oscar
: neither man,
nor marked with natural cover.

That leaves her
with art.

First display case. Dumb-struck. For all her notable difference – this one had alluded Oscar. This unidentified force. Shaping her life. Had thought it had nothing to do – with her. Until. This moment.

Camouflage
: necessity of.

Oscar
: lack of.

Oscar at odds.

A troubling bewilderment exiting her body – last grains in hour glass – gasp.

Sixty years to get here.

“**A**t a slant.” Dickenson knew. Glimpses of a narrative’s ghosts. Most a writer can hope for.

Prior to London. It’s her cousin who tells her the story. Farm fields unfurled. Her cousin’s mom arriving one day. Unexpected.

Oscar. Left alone.
Strips of wallpaper piled up in her crib (pulling at what’s beneath).
Her aunt gets a glimpse.

Fifty-nine years later. Upon hearing this story. Oscar gets a glimpse too.

To foil: run over or cross (ground or scent) to confuse the hounds. How it’s done.
Oscar. Never taught. Not her instinct. But her mother adept at.

Oscar outside the pack(t).

In the deep of night – swell of sadness bursting sleep.

Oscar’s son. Absence. Asunder. Ache of it. Devotion not enough. Plot: only one. Mother. One. After seven years. Done. How could? It was. Is. Will be. Oscar. Training herself. To change *without* him. To *with* her self.

Elaine Scarry: “we cannot perceive beauty in the absence of justice.” Oscar. Searching for another beauty. Just of justice. Turning away from loss of. Insidious grief.

In restaurants:
“How many?”

“Just – one.”

Brenda Hillman.
“..the word and the sentence share custody of the phrase.”

Her young daughter “ferrying” back & forth. No more mom & dad. (Now you have TWO homes!)

Hillman

: “my writing was falling apart.” Rupture everywhere.

The sentence in denial.

Word and phrase make due.

Oscar. Drying. Her son walks in. To pee. Peering. Expecting a penis. On her. Trying to make sense of it. He signs: “You’re my dad.” Began after Oscar’s surgery. Double mastectomy. Oscar more than ever in between.

Familiar to Oscar.

Bewildering to her son.

Him just getting boys & girls.

Oscar. Addressed as “Sir” and “Ma’am” within seconds. Membership is how it works. What camouflage signals. Automatic positioning. What to expect. Who to trust. And not.

Her son bewilders others too. “What’s that thing on his ear?” “Why does he talk funny?” “Why does he run that way?” Him between normal and not, asking: “Why do kids stare at me?”

Mom

: between.

Son

: between.

Sans camo.

A comfort with each other

: odd freedom.



Portrait of the Artist as a Young Slave

Andrew Darlington

Anyway, it must have been some time around seeing that old queen Caravaggio in the movie that I decided I wanted into art. I studied at St Martins College. That's where I and a guy called Byron Hamilton hook up almost immediately. We share a room. Sketch each other. At first mutually. Often nude. I guess even then I knew he was better than me. So it gets he does the painting, while my talent is to be more passive. I assume poses, furnish curves, light, contours, shapes for him to replicate in oils. Were we lovers? Not exactly. But we do a bit of this, try a bit of that. Experimenting as awareness dictates, body piercing, nail varnish, distressed hair. Embracing the bravado of virtually any kind of weirdness just to show how liberated we are. We explore physical limits. We take what they used to call "carnal knowledge" of each other. And naturally that involves some below-the-belt lip-action, mutual body-games. It's what you're supposed to do. It was expected. And we fit together well. We function well.

And Edgar Stromberg? When I first meet him it's a student-art event, and he is there as guest of honour to pass critical judgement. I fix my gaze on his back, willing him to turn. He, unaware of the compulsion – conscious only that he has turned, turns towards me. He expresses interest. I'm flattered. He's a star, a legend. Who would not be flattered? And I feel the same sense of bewilderment the Pevensie children must have felt on their first step through the wardrobe into Narnia. With me as Edmund, the precocious betrayer, more sensitive, vulnerable, and self-centred than the others. He knows how to charm. Practiced in the art of deception. You know it's deliberate. A routine. While at the same time, when it's aimed at you, you're fascinated. We share a cab back to his apartment. I'm so fascinated and repelled I scarcely notice him reaching across to run his hand over the front of my pants, tracing the shape of my cock. "I'd like to get to know you better," he says softly, his fingers circling my cock, gauging its size, squeezing "and you." As soon as we're inside, he unfastens the belt on his trousers and shoves them down. His shirt covering his thighs, leaving just a

hint of pubence and the dark shape of his testicles hung beneath the material. Then he shucks his left leg free of the pants, raising his right leg to remove the discarded garments, and his semi-erect cock lolls into view. Large, circumcised. He smiles, turns his back on me and walks into the next room, his arse moving beneath the flapping shirt. I follow meekly to find him sat on the edge of the bed, masturbating lazily. Surely, if I want to make a good impression – which I do, if I want to guarantee acquiring the benefits of his art-patronage – it would be tantamount to crime to leave so promising a hard-on orally unmolested, to allow those imminent spurts to go undigested.

Within a week I've moved in with him. I live with Edgar for five weeks, naively believing that he's working hard to promote my art. I meet Byron in Starbucks to talk over the new situation. He has doubts. There's work to do, surely that must come first? "Why work when you can party? My life will be my art." He says he'll dedicate a piece to me in his first one-man show. He'll title it... um, let me think, yeah, "Miss Slutty Spunkbucket Regrets". I laugh. It's a joke, yeah? I watch him drink coffee, thinking, "I'm going places, and he's lost the plot."

With Edgar, soon, it gets... strange. He's supposedly... drawn to my art. That's the point of contact. I'd assumed it was my technique, my expression, my brushwork. The economy of line. But no. It's the subject-matter. Voluptuous contours of nude flesh. My body in Byron's paintings. That realisation only comes later. Gradually. Edgar's sexually undemanding, taking the initiative infrequently – as little as four or five times a week, on which occasion I'm compliantly naked for him, crouched as he takes me from behind. I'm anxious to please, I need to prove myself, and strive even when he doesn't respond or can't sustain an erection. What's the point of offering yourself up as a sex-toy if you're being insufficiently toyed with?

I'm beginning to feel neglected, insecure in my new role.

At a party somewhere in a big house out Hampstead way I meet Max Beardsley. At first there

are no words. We have eye-conversation, nothing more, although – of course, I know and worship at the shrine of his work. When we do talk he's openly contemptuous about Edgar. He's also handsome and so arrogant it hurts. Edgar is a time-waster, he says, I'd do better to ditch him, hook up with the real power in the London art-world – and only he, Max, can furnish such introductions. While he's saying it his hand is in my groin, caressing and squeezing firmly and without hesitation. I'm both flattered and a little scared of him. When he indicates I should follow him I have no choice but to obey. Upstairs the bedrooms are all in use, so he leads me into the toilet, locks the door, eases me unresistingly to my knees, and fucks my face. There's no other way to describe it. I've never been treated so peremptorily or so brutally, he's intimidatingly hung and rams clear into my throat when the fierce hail of sperm begins.

I stay naked at his beck and call for the best part of the next months. Besotted with him. He's charismatic, full of black depressions and huge roaring joys, lean looks and fierce silences, with half-closed eyes giving a perpetually sleepy expression, a confirmed somnambulist air, a highly effective mask for one of the keenest minds in art. I watch him work in the studio. Then he lies on his back as I fellate him for what seems like hours, so close I'm welded to the soft down of his body-hair, to the warm rise and fall of his belly-undulations, trying in every way possible to please him, then I lie on my back so he can face-fuck me, impaling so deep I'm close to crying out in fear and panic of suffocation, but too scared to protest, too in awe of him to risk his disapproval. The more he uses and humiliates me the more I love him. A dreamy-eyed stupefied forlorn fucked-up kind of love.

Max values physical sensation. The physical above the spiritual. Above all else. And physicality is so important in creating art. There must be touch. Pigment beneath broken nails. I watch him pushing paint around. While he creates, the world is on fire. Cities in flame all around us. There must be terrible and repellent images in his head, hard-wired to the moon. And when they come out, he blasts them across canvas. Creativity, creation, re-creation, procreation, it's all the same. His most extreme karmic pharmaceutical reactions taking improvisational flight. He has paintings called "Dreaming & Silent Breeze", "Fuck The World" and "White Noise". Then there's the installations. Sculptural shapes suspended in formaldehyde in large fluid-filled vitrine tanks. Cobalt and crimson illuminations that wash the walls like some high-tech lamination. Glints of hard aquarium-green light, all detail lost until they become... Shapes? Hallucinations? Until there's only a twisting forest submerged in the unnatural luminance of alien atmospheres. "Feed Your Head" and "Preternatural Hermaphrodites". A dissolving morass of tentacles

and copper weed. Fuzzy fronds filtering purple light, spreading in widening ripples of colour. And something else. Something important. Something significant. Something rearing against the density of air. And it's like I'm reading screeds of hallucinatory prose, seeing snapshots of the unconscious, the dreams and nightmares of this impossible place. I feel my inadequacy by comparison.

Gradually – as he promised, he introduces me to the Gay Art underworld, and I grow to think of myself as a part of this delightfully debauched society. A demimonde of beautifully narcissistic male models with long black curls, outrageously glamorous transvestites, wealthy and witty patrons of the galleries, cultured and sophisticated, and the bohemian artists themselves. I can scarcely believe my luck, these are artists I've queued to see at the Serpentine, the Tate Modern or the White Cube. These are the gimpyface critics I've seen discussing the new Monet show or the latest Tracey Emin on the late-night TV-review, or read their pontifications in arts publications. What could I do to deserve their attention? except – of course, the delicious naughtiness I'm more than qualified to bestow. When we talk about incidents from the night before – "does Max object?" the famous artist says, "we change, we grow, otherwise it means the end of sex for me... and what we do becomes nothing more than tandem masturbation." And I imagine myself to be desired by them all, enlivened by the flame of wine, and other pleasing substances. I tease and tantalise them, encourage and manipulate them. I'm young, good-looking, highly sexed. Later, of course, I realise that it was I who was being used, passed from lover to lover, abandoned by each in turn, but in my inflated egoist self-image *I'm* using *them* to scale the social ladder. Like, how screwed up is that?

I live on pills that keep me awake for days on end, razoring my senses to the edge. Max takes tablets too, a heart murmur or some-such, an occasional breath-shortage which might curtail a work session, or a peak moment of erotic exertion. I never wear underwear so as not to impede a new lover's fingers, and spend time at decadent parties competing for the attention of men – or being competed for. Always – in my mind, the centre of attention. The host sets out feathers, bottles of aromatics, slippery and tasty lotions, some twine, assorted and beautifully coloured thongs, and big plumed masks. Often I'll take two or three men to bedrooms in succession, I prefer to give blow-jobs, but if they want anal then that's fine, too, I accept this tainted love with equal enthusiasm. As the parties disintegrate into disreputable sprawls of stoned bodies I don't even bother to dress, but parade naked, kissing and carousing. I've always loved sex, and always had an exhibitionist tendency; I'm well-hung, and appear that way even when flaccid, which is important, so I've never been

less than peacock proud to be seen nude (and admired) in company. Sometimes when I return to Max's after a particularly debauched night I might feel used or momentarily ashamed – but the feeling seldom lasts. Max insists we are growing through artistic evolutions, and its most important aesthetic is to remain “open to suggestions.”

There are compensations. We eat in Knightsbridge restaurants or queer Soho bistros where they greet him by name. One weekend Max takes me to the Venice Biennale, another time to Florence. But those days have left scars, invisible ones, too. Sex stops you thinking of things like that. Each act of sex takes you through time, twenty minutes closer to death. Sex is a pleasing numbness that suffuses and nullifies your intellect. An anaesthetic for a deeper ache. An easy distraction.

So how does it all start to come apart? We go up to Manchester to arrange a gallery show, and we stay over with the gallery owner, Roland Blasco. At first he seems intense, dauntingly so, austere, authoritarian, brooking no argument that contradicts his point of view.

After checking out the gallery-space in the trendy St Paul's area, wiring DVD installations, setting up slide-projectors and lighting, we return to Blasco's house up on the edge of the high-ground towards Saddlesworth moor. It's a remote converted farmhouse overlooking the city, so isolated anything could go on here and no one would ever know. And, as we walk in, it becomes apparent it's not so much converted as in the process of conversion, stepladders and bags of plaster, coils of wiring and plastic conduits in the musty upstairs rooms. A soft-furnished studio, bedroom and lounge below – “we're restoring the original stone hearth and fireplace, putting a range in through there.” Roland's boyfriend – Ian “Brat” – assumes the waiter's role. He seems sullen and unfriendly, about eighteen, his head shaved to a mere shading, he wears an Aleister Crowley T-shirt with the eyes torn out to reveal his prominent nipples. He wears tight black trouser with, I can't help but notice, a bulging crotch. He hardly speaks throughout the evening, with Max and Roland Blasco naturally dominating the conversation, but once darkness falls Max produces joints and the atmosphere begins to loosen up. I find myself flirting a little. Soon we're all, I guess, a little high.

Blasco pulls out a recent canvas, a violent jangle of discordant colours surrounding a naked figure in a tormented position, his rounded sensual buttocks painstakingly painted. Instantly recognisable as “Brat”. There are more, all nude, all of Brat. My attention drawn to the fact that, in some of the pictures where the genitalia is visible, he's uncircumcised, large – and totally lacking pubic hair. At length, while Brat is serving him from a tray, Roland says, “it's time for your party-piece, dear. Bring the specials.” Ian colours visibly and hesitates, but Blasco

clips him sharply on the bottom, “come on, don't be awkward,” and the youth leaves the room. Blasco leans over to me and shockingly lays his hand firmly on my crotch, squeezing insistently. I glance across at Max who just smiles his approval. “Watch this,” smirks Blasco, “you'll enjoy it very much.” When he reappears he's carrying a thick portfolio of preparatory sketches. I sit there as we thumb through them: Brat nude, legs splayed and erect, Brat with hands tied behind his back, gagged, legs splayed, Brat masturbating, Brat ejaculating, Brat's anus and testicles, Brat's face with an anonymous penis touching his nose, Brat tongue-kissing a nude boy. Although undeniably well-executed they're all figurative line-drawing stuff, strictly representational life-studies lacking Max's quirky individualism, essentially sexed-up variations of the kind of life-class work I'd done at St Martins.

Roland Blasco leers as he sits beside me. “See this one?” – Brat's lips forced apart by another penis, his eyes closed, Brat and another boy lying nude feeding on each other's erections. “They're beautiful,” I admit huskily. “Perhaps you'd like to pose some time.” “Me?” “You'd look good together.” “Sure you would,” urges Max. “But you'd have to be shaved,” says Blasco. “Is he *really* shaved?” laughs Max. “Here,” Blasco beckons and Brat crosses to his side, draping his arm around the youth's waist so his fingers trail along the belt of his pants, “shall we show 'em, Brat?”

Morning finds both “masters” lying on their backs while we crouch between their splayed legs sucking luxuriously, glancing covetously at each other over our respective mouthfuls. It's then that Blasco suggests a swap for the rest of the weekend, that each man should have the other's boyfriend as a personal possession with full sex-rights. I'm not too keen on the idea, but as he's holding my head into his groin at the time, I'm unable to protest. Later, in the lounge, as we prepare to return to the gallery, the transaction continues in a vague hypothetical game-playing way without consulting either of us. There are to be no physical limits placed on the servitude, and Blasco insists, half-joking, that as a token to emphasise my new role as his possession I should be shaved. I protest half-heartedly, unsure if it's intended as a joke or not, until he produces a laser-knife. “Hold him, Brat.”

Despite my feeble play-struggles I'm seized and held down spread-eagled on the carpet. Brat is unexpectedly strong, pinioning my shoulders. Max holding my legs. Blasco grabs my T-shirt, slides the knife beneath it, and cuts it clean down the front until he's able to rip it free and throw it into a corner. “Hey, my T-shirt, man!” “Quiet.” His knee on my chest, the knife pricks my nipple, traces its way down to my navel, and on down, under my belt, to sever it. “No,” I laugh nervously, “enough, right?” At first I wriggle

against their grip, meaning it this time, pleading, but as the blade gets closer to my groin I freeze. It is cold as it slides beneath my shorts, as the fibre parts its way inexorably down. A tug, and it falls away in rags. He scoops it and bundles it away, and I'm nude.

Roland Blasco stirs my penis with the knife. "Nice, but the pubic fuzz has to go." He seizes a handful and cuts it off with the knife, it tugs unpleasantly and I yell. "Get the gear, Brat," from Blasco, and he reappears from the bathroom with razor and shaving foam. Roland squeezes the aerosol over my genitals, my cock in one hand, the razor in the other. Hands merge and fumble, working together on my now-glistening thighs. "Keep still," Max hisses, "or they'll cut the bloody thing off by mistake." So I steel myself to lie still.

While Ian carefully trims my pubic hair, Blasco shaves the stubble that remains. I bite my lip, feel the sensation of the blade on my groin, testicles and around what Blasco refers to as my man-hole. Someone is shaving between my legs – I feel the kiss of the blade – to grunts of approval. Someone else is sliding a foam-lubricated finger up my anus making me squirm. The ordeal extends. At last, long moments later, my groin is sponged and towelled dry and they leave me alone more nude than I've ever felt, my thighs bare and bizarre, my genitals seemingly bigger.

Blasco unfastens the thin black belt from Ian and manipulates it, passing it around the base of my penis and encircling my scrotum. I stand there and let him – what's the point of resisting? – set the small combination lock tightly into place with the padlock resting beside my testicles, forcing me out so it seems to induce a near-permanent erection. The small disc attached says "property of Roland Blasco." "You must obey your new master in every way," says Max Beardsley softly, "until the hair has grown back. Only then will the clasp be removed." "This is a joke, right," I pout, acting surly and brattish. "This is serious." Max's words, "you must say 'I accept these conditions.'" I cover my face in my hands in mock shyness, "Okay, okay, whatever, I accept the conditions."

Only then am I allowed to pull on a pair of faded Levi's (no briefs) and one of Brat's T-shirts with holes targeting the nipples. He also produces a studded dog-collar, insisting I wear that, too. I feel oddly surreal, my groin crawling with strange sensations. I'm embarrassed and ashamed, but also undeniably aroused and slutty. With some misgivings, I watch Max leave. He goes out the room without even a backward glance. Ian goes down to the car with him. But hey, it's just a game. It's La Ronde, an amusing body-roulette, isn't it? Yet I'm thinking, to have sex with a guy you respect, admire, or fancy is one thing. To have sex with a stranger you're unsure about just because the rules say you must, is something else. But it's only a sophisticated role-play of sub/dom, all you do is play it out on it's own terms. That's all. Nothing more. How bad

can it get? I'm not here for me. I'm here as a pledge to Max. To do anything other than what he wants will be to betray him, to disappoint him.

We spend the day at the gallery. Mostly Roland ignores me. Until around lunchtime. He indicates the toilets. I precede him into the cubicle, throat dry, unbuckle my pants, shrug them down to my knees. He waits expectantly, so – sensing what he wants of me, I crouch to unzip him. His cock is hard, its stale sweaty smell reaching me. There's the taint of disinfectant and the sound of dripping water. I can hear someone moving outside, the tap running, and, feeling vulgar, I crouch and cram the cock-head into my mouth, snaring the foul salty taste. "You can't get enough of that, right?" I nod, as best I can. "When I thrust up your ass I want to hear you grunt and howl so loud he can hear outside and know exactly what I'm doing to you." I mumble something around a mouthful of cock, reluctant to release it for fear of something worse. He pulls back and I hang onto it, sucking hard. Make him shoot quickly, get it over with. He grabs my hair brutally and extracts slowly until it slops free and hangs in my face. "No, I'm going to fuck you." I stick my tongue out, force against his grip, lick it so it quivers, he twists me away and around. I comply reluctantly, brace up against cistern, relax as much as I can to make it easier. In a single thrust he's in me and I'm grunting and mewling like some deranged animal as he forces me forward and fucks efficiently and emotionlessly until he comes, my own genitals bouncing and slapping with each thrust and the indescribable sensation of penetration as I orgasm, too, shooting spasms of long gooey strands over the toilet seat.

Later, we cross to the car park and he pulls out into the fast lane. "How many lovers have you had?" "Lovers – or just partners, encounters...? More than some I guess, less than others." "Do you imagine yourself to be pathetically and hopelessly in love with Max Beardsley?" "Not love exactly. I love his creativity, his inventive originality, his art... his cock." "Is he sexually demanding?" "He can be." He guffaws. "What's he like you to do?" "Give him head." "And you get off on this?" "What do think? Course I do." "How frequently does he make you do these disgusting things?" This interrogation – no, this inquisition, goes on for the full duration of the journey back until he's extracted every intimate detail of our life together.

The evening is worse. Like I've died and gone to some special part of hell set aside for inverts. Details blur in nastiness. Only the rectal ache, the sour taste at the back of my throat. It's then I decide to get out. To hell with this. I don't need it. To hell with what Max wants. This is no fun. I've got no money, no cards. The clothes I'm stood up in, and they're not even mine. The next day begins the same. He ignores me in the gallery, but I know if I wait long enough, until he gets bored

and finds the time, it'll begin again. So what is it you resent more, the way he uses you, or the way he ignores you? After all, isn't that why you ditched poor Edgar, because of his essentially undemanding sexuality? Because he was insufficiently forceful? And that genital-shaving thing, you resented it – sure, you resented it, but you enjoyed being the focus of all that concentrated attention, didn't you? You got off on having your groin the centre of scrutiny. Admit it. For long moments I'm alone at the merchandising counter. Postcard reproductions. Personalised pens. A leaflet from a previous exhibition – Edgar Stromberg, wonder what he's doing now? Art biographies. Max Beardsley this and Max Beardsley that. He won't mind. I fist a handful of notes from the till, then step outside for a toke of fresh air. And keep walking. The street stretches away. There are traffic lights, red, amber, green, red, amber, green. An ad hoarding for Audi. A newsagents. It's cold. I don't know where the hell I am, but I keep walking and don't stop.

All seasons have become winter. Everything is gone. Even the dream. Day is dead. All that's left is the twilight of this strange flat light. With a silence inside me, deep and unrelenting. Confused and dirty, I find my way back to London. Time has passed. A dark and confusing time. Byron Hamilton, my former flatmate, endured months of penury and focused squalor. And now, I read in the review-columns of a paper I pick up on the Tube, he has his first one-man exhibition to show for it, works produced during the period of my debauchery. One of his pieces on display is called "Miss Slutty Spunkbucket Regrets." I laugh, it's a joke, yeah? Him, he's going places. Me, I've lost the plot, with nothing to show but pain and humiliation. Can't even get the cock-ring off, although I scrape it raw. After what seems like forever, I'm back at Max's. Nowhere else to go. No other direction home. The house is quiet. So quiet it's painful. I'm climbing narrow stairs that protest each step, across a crimson landing washed by a single suspended bulb. ■

Lucy Burnett chevrolet

sideways on and slanted caught upon
an angle of a hip a single label
and a frayless always frayless rip
a useless pocket and an opening up

to nowhere zip that catch upon my eye
like velcro so i follow it i follow
it? the pitted pattern of heels
upon the pavement the swagger in a sway

the way it moves grooves out future déjà
vus along the passing looks that look
like me i'm seeing me in stubbled
faces hearing me in workmen whistles

tasting me like bile in the underage
of a teenage drinker's throat a lager gloat
as I'm feeling me in the tailored suits which pass
too close brushed to sheen perhaps on her?

please turn and talk is all i ask myself

12



John McCullough

The Other Side of Winter

Overnight the Thames decides to move again.
The ice beneath the frost fair cracks. Tents,
merry-go-rounds and bookstalls glide about

on islands given up for lost. They race,
switch places, touch – the printing press nuzzling
the swings – then part, slip quietly under.

Still there is no end of crystal weather.
I hoard coal, stare mostly at the chimney's back,
fingering the pipe he gave me on the quay.

Even now it keeps his greatcoat's whiff:
ale, oranges, resolve; his prison-ship lurking
out from shore, huge as Australia.

I'll write, my dear sweet man. And he squeezed
my thigh then turned, a sergeant again,
bellowing at a slouching flock of convicts.

I do not have the nerve to light it.
The mouthpiece is covered with teeth marks, sweat.
I look out at my museum-garden,

the shrubs locked in glass cases,
the latticework a galaxy of frozen dew.
There is no snow in New South Wales.

I cannot put it down. It makes things happen.
This morning I heard a crash and ran outside to find
a jackdaw flat on the lawn. It must have fallen

from the sky, its wings locked together
by hardened sleet, its neck twisted as though broken
from straining to see the incredible.

Melancholy and the poem. The intensification of the moment by lovers and the poet's deep attentiveness to each telling step of the poem share a similar state of consciousness. When we fully occupy the moment we must simultaneously acquiesce to sadness for our fleeting encounters with it and one another. The very structure of this poem's syllabic lines and tercet stanzas embodies this: evoke the details of how a left behind lover watches the familiar surroundings now become symbols of paralyses and loss ("the shrubs locked in glass cases"). The one object he can hold in his hand, smell and taste ("fingering the pipe he gave me") links them. Yet, this object disorients him too ("I do not have the nerve to light it"). The trapdoor of narrative has swung open beneath his feet: the ordinary suddenly now the "incredible." The scale, skill and sensitivity of this poem haunt us. **Betsy Warland, Judge, Poetry Category, 2008.**

We Want to Be Desired

Sophie Mayer talks to Lucía Puenzo

Lucía Puenzo's *XXY* was a Centrepiece screening at the 2008 London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. It arrived trailing awards like a glitter boa: the Critics' Week Grand Prize from Cannes 2007, the New Director's Awards from Edinburgh, and Golden Athena and Kinnarree from Athens and Bangkok respectively. It was Argentina's official entry for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar in 2008.

Not bad for an uncompromising film about an intersex youth from a first-time director. Of course, neither the subject nor the filmmaker are as simple as that: Puenzo is a well-known Argentinean novelist with a dozen screenplays under her belt, and the film is also a sexy teen romance, a bittersweet coming-of-age story, and an extraordinarily beautiful look at a landscape at the end of the world, an island off the coast of Uruguay.

Like the island, the film isn't exactly mainstream – and that's part of its beauty. Rather than a psychological investigation into growing up intersex, or a tragic tale with all the usual clichés, it takes its cues from the natural world that surrounds the characters. Alex's father, the resonantly named Kraken, is a marine biologist and conservationist, and his work brings Alex into connection – and comparison – with the rich, polygendered marine world of sea turtles, frondy plants, and even a hint of mermaid.

Alex, as played by Inés Efron, is the film's muse: an intensely imaginative character whose wide blue eyes, with their piercing gaze, shape the film. Looking at everything intensely – lizards, the sea, other people – in an effort to understand who and how to become, Alex invites the viewer to look as intensely, as deeply and to see wonders.

SM: From the very beginning the film made me ask questions. I thought that the pulsating forms in the opening sequence indicated we were under the sea, but my friend thought it was an image of the womb. There's a strong association between the sea and conception in the film – Suli conceived Alex on the beach, Alex reads a book about mermaids. Is Alex a mermaid? Is that why she's running with a knife, like the knives the Little Mermaid walks on, in the scenes intercut with the opening sequence?

LP: It is exactly both: womb and water. Many ideas come and relationships come from mysterious places, I was certain this story had to be told in that location, that the titles had to be a mixture of womb and water, and that the opening sequence should be Alex running with desperation with a knife in her hand, feeling trapped, just as she is at the beginning of the story. I don't like to look for too many reasons for this. I've always enjoyed literature and cinema that raises questions more than that which gives answers.

Finishing a book or leaving the cinema with a head full of questions is good enough for me.

SM: But why the sea in particular as a metaphor and a landscape? And why make Kraken a marine biologist?

LP: I liked the idea of a biologist who, with a child like Alex, has become obsessed with the study of sexuality in certain hermaphrodite species, such as sea turtles whose sex cannot be determined from the outside, whose gonads have to be examined for their sex to be determined. In his book *The Origin of Sex* [which Alex is reading in the film], he is merely trying to understand. His ideological position [concerning Alex's right to choose gender] has a lot to do with his research.

SM: Why was it important to make this an ensemble film, and particularly to have several contrasting parent/child relationships throughout?

LP: When I began to read about everything that had been happening in the world the last years with children born with genital ambiguity, the surgeries, the consequences: I could not understand how and why their parents had allowed such a thing. Then I met many families who had been in that position, and speaking to them, understanding their fears, why they did it, the respect of the medical word, what happened after, how difficult it was... it's a complex situation. It's easy to speak from the outside, but for a father or mother in that situation, every decision is difficult and risky.

SM: How have trans and intersex viewers responded to the film?

LP: Many intersex friends have told me they liked the film not because of the idea of freedom of choice that many people saw in it, but because of the place the film gives to desire. And I agree: it's not enough to say we should respect anybody and any sexual identity and give every individual the right to do as he or she pleases with their identity. The film includes the possibility that anybody (a virgin like Alvaro, in this case) could fall in love and be aroused by a body like Alex's. Perlongher, one of my favourite poets, used to say: "We do not want respect, we want to be desired."

SM: The erotic energy and play between the four teenagers (Alex, Alvaro, and Alex's island friends, Vando and Roberta) was honest and polymorphously sexy, yet never exploitative. How did you work with the actors to make the scenes convincing without being sexualised?

LP: We began to rehearse, improvise, play, search for the bodies of the characters, the way they spoke. I tried to have as much time as possible to work with the actors on the scene, with only the DP and cameraman looking, to give the actors as much freedom as possible, not to have them move inside the shot I imagined, but to create the shot after seeing them move in the scene.

SM: Both Alex and Alvaro express themselves through art. In fact, one of the most intense scenes of connection and attraction is when Alvaro reads Alex's diary and looks at the sculptures of dolls with cigarette butt penises. How did you create Alex's Frida Kahlo-like diary?

LP: I showed Inés the work of a German painter who did small girls with male genitals in the woods, and asked her to invent Alex's diary, to start to know who she was... and she came up with this amazing piece of art which I decided to include in the film.

SM: The film won an award in Bangkok – in Thailand,

there is a very different cultural take on the gender binary than in Europe and North America. How has it been to tour with the film to different countries with different kinds of gender rights and sexual cultures/freedoms?

LP: In Argentina, Italy, France and Spain and other countries where the film has been already released, it created a debate on what seems almost impossible in our societies: an intersex body that has not been mutilated, and not only survives, but demands the opportunity to be desired. Who decides, after all, that there are only two ways to be human?

SM: How does Spanish deal with trans identities? Some English-speaking writers and activists use 'zhe' and 'hir' to refer to people who do not identify with either gender. Is there a Spanish equivalent?

LP: Not really. Using their name. Saying Alex, not he or she.

SM: How would you describe the feeling of the ending – Alex walking away arm in arm with Kraken, and a final shot of the sea – and why did you choose it?

LP: The film ends exactly at the point where Alex chooses an identity.

SM: What is that decision?

LP: If I have to give an answer I would say *XXY* speaks about freedom of choice, identity and desire. But the truth is I prefer to let everybody see whatever they want to see in the film.



XXY is distributed by Peccadillo Pictures and is available on DVD from www.peccapod.com

The Death of Sindy

James Dufficy

We're almost home when Tommy throws Sindy out the rear passenger window. At first he laughed – we both did. She looked funny flying through the air like an arrow into the trees. Then the little baby started crying and screaming.

My life was perfect before him. Ten years of bliss, then this thing arrives. For ten years I had all the love in the world to myself. Then I had to share. As if this was a good thing. As if this was something I was supposed to learn.

My mum whipped round in the front seat and shouted, "What's the matter?"

Tommy stopped his screeching and, between sobs, whimpered, "Sindy went out the window!"

"How on earth...?"

"I threw her!" he said.

"Why did you do that?"

Tommy looked at me and then back at my mum. "Angela said she could fly!"

I opened my mouth and adopted my best look of outraged innocence. But my mum wasn't having any of it and dug right in. "Angela! How could you?" I was about to defend myself when she turned to my dad. "Joe, we've got to turn round. Tommy threw his doll out the window."

In his rear-view mirror, my dad looked at both of us, then focussed back on the road and kept driving.

"Joe! We have to go back!"

But my dad wasn't having it. "We're bloody not." "Joe!"

"Match starts at two. I don't have time to go hunting for a bloody doll."

My mum turned round and re-directed her anger at us. First, Tommy: "That was a very dangerous thing to do. You could have hurt someone." Then at me: "You and I will talk about this when we get home."

I kicked the seat. "But she *can* fly!"

As punishment, they wouldn't top up my phone for a week. Then, as if to provoke me, they went out and bought a replacement Sindy for Tommy. He seemed delighted to have a fresh version of her. Everything was forgotten until I told him that it was a substitute,

a robot they'd made to try and fool him; that it wasn't Sindy at all. I couldn't help myself. It was one of the things I was good at – making him cry. It bolstered my self-esteem.

I was denied use of the car.

My mum sat me down in the kitchen and blew smoke at the top of my head.

"Why do you insist on torturing him?" she said. "You're his big sister. You need to think about acting your age."

On and on she goes, cliché after cliché.

"I don't torture him!" I said. "It's not my fault he's totally gullible. If he's mentally *challenged* in some way..."

"He's not challenged in any way!" she said. "But I have my doubts about you." She put out her cigarette. "You're responsible for what happened to Sindy and you're going to have to make amends somehow."

"Amends?" I said. "Am I in AA or something?"

My mother switched tack and appeared sympathetic. "Do you want to use the car Saturday night or not?"

I composed myself, and as meekly and mildly as I could, I said, "Yes, please."

"Then take him out and go find the bloody doll!" I groaned. "None of that!" she snapped. "When you were that age you loved Sindy as much as he does. And he needs nurturing from *everyone* in this family."

I don't remember having a doll phase. I was into toy appliances. Fake food processors, plastic power drills, that sort of thing.

Tommy and I drove up and down the Bromyard Road looking for Sindy's body. I slowed down and thought I knew roughly where the accident had happened, but couldn't find any trace of her, just empties and bits of tire scattered along the side of the road.

Finally, as we were passing the aqueduct for the tenth time, Tommy shouted out, "There she is! I can see her dress!"

I stopped the car in a lay-by, got out and walked over to the grass embankment. Sindy was laying face down in a patch of mud next to some snowdrops. If I'd had a camera and a pair of gloves we could have played CSI.

Tommy stopped a foot or two away. "Do you

think she's dead?"

I crouched down next to the doll. Her bright pink dress was splattered with dirt, her purple and silver hair was tangled with twigs and grass. Her shoes were missing; they'd probably been blown off on impact. It was one of those grisly details I'd heard about but never seen before.

I cleared my throat. "She's definitely dead."

Tommy's lips trembled. "Maybe we can save her?"

I picked up the doll and turned her over; her placid, idiotic expression looking up to the sky. "No, she's dead. Either the force of landing killed her, or the hypothermia from being left out all night."

Tommy edged a little closer. "But her eyes are open."

I picked up the doll by the legs and held her out horizontally. "Look, rigor mortis has set in." I laid her back down and pretended to shut her eyes with my fingers, just like they do on CSI.

My father gave Cindy a decent burial in the back garden. My mother had scrubbed the body with Flash and combed out her hair. She was buried by the robinia tree in a shoebox wrapped in a Waitrose carrier bag. I did not attend the funeral.

Finally, out of desperation and with the weekend approaching, I had an idea.

I pulled my hair back, adopted my best serious, mature pose and approached my mum. "Look, I know I've been horrible, but I truly want to make amends with Tommy."

She looked at me suspiciously. "You do? How?"

"Well, now that poor Cindy's dead and buried, why don't we build a roadside memorial for her? Some sort of marker for where the accident took place." My mum shook her head and obviously didn't get it. "You know, the kind of thing they do for motorcycle deaths," I said. "We saw lots of them in Tenerife."

Her face lit up. "They're so sad sometimes," she said. "But that's a wonderful idea." Then she held my face in her hands and smiled. "Ang, you can be a great big sister when you try."

I smiled at the car keys hanging by the kitchen door.

The plan is to go to art college and study commercial design. I want to do window display, that sort of thing. I've always been creative. It's my other talent.

So I drew up some designs and made a small cross out of plywood and then spray-painted it glossy white. When it had dried, I wrote "Sindy" across it in glitter marker in gothic lettering. It looked fabulous, until Tommy covered it with Bart Simpson stickers. He wanted to "collaborate".

We bought some manky daffodils at Tesco's and drove out to the crime scene. Again, I couldn't remember

exactly where the spot was. The snowdrops were gone by then. But I pretended and told Tommy that it was by some oak tree. I stuck the cross in the ground and he lay the flowers down in front of it.

I said, "Now, when everyone drives by, they'll remember Sindy. She'll live forever."

We stood there for a few seconds until I was freezing. "Uh, we better be going," I said. "I've got to get ready."

But Tommy wouldn't move. "Aren't we supposed to say something?"

"But I just did."

"No. Something nice about Sindy."

I tugged at the hood of his parka. "Didn't you do that at her funeral?"

"No. Dad just buried her and went back inside."

I looked at my watch. "Okay! Okay! Say something then! But hurry up!"

Tommy stared at the white cross and concentrated. "I love you, Sindy. More than the new Sindy, who's just a robot." He reached out and placed another sticker under her name.

"Good!" I said. "Let's go."

People in cars were whizzing by and had started to turn their lights on. Tommy still wouldn't budge. I started to pull at him to get him back to the car.

"Now *you* have to say something nice about Sindy!"

"Oh, baby brother, sometimes..."

Something nice about Sindy? A whole range of possibilities flooded my mind.

"Okay," I said. "She had really cool hair."

Tommy thought about this for a moment. "Yeah, but she dyes it. It's not as nice as yours."

I flicked my hair over one shoulder, looked at his tiny face looking up at me and I almost cried. Physical compliments always choke me up inside. He took my hand and we walked to the car silently. I realised then that he was pure good, that his innocence was almost a disability. In the car on the way home I kept glancing over at him holding onto the new Sindy. It was like they were out on a date or something. ■

Vivienne Maricevic

Male Burlesk

Being in the right place and the right time in the early 1980s led me to the world of male burlesk. Walking by the Metropole on 7th Avenue near 49th Street, a man handed me a pamphlet advertising a new women-only club with male dancers. The Crazy Horse was garishly decorated in red velvet with lights flashing as a nude dancer discoed to Donna Summer's "Last Dance." There were no customers, but the owners were friendly and we sipped wine and talked about my photographic work. They agreed to me photographing the dancers if they signed a release form. By the following week, though, the club had switched to a gay audience.

"We weren't making any money," Michael the manager explained. "Now it's crowded."

Over a period of a few months the dancers and I became friends; they looked forward to my return and laughed when they saw pictures of themselves. There was talk of decorating the walls of the club with my photographs.

Peter finished dancing to Chic's "Baby, Do It Right" and we talked about male burlesque. "Seen one, seen 'em all," he said about nudity. He was in it for the money and liked an audience. He was from Brooklyn, 24 years old with a high school diploma and a full-time day job. He'd been in the Navy, so undressing in front of men came naturally to him. He considered himself straight and didn't make extra money from hustling as many of the other dancers did.

"I dance to the lights," he said. "Not the men."

A number of the dancers moved from club to club. They lived the same way – from one rooming house to another. Many didn't have phone numbers or addresses to give me to stay in touch. Hustling was a way of life – they sold their bodies or drugs. Money was the key word, and they spent it as soon as they got it. From the latest gold-charm to dye for their hair. They were paid as much as \$300 a week at Chez Elle and as little as \$5 a performance at The Ramrod, the most notorious of the clubs. Dancers at The Ramrod – fifteen per show – were known in the porn movie world as The Italian Stallion, The Fury and 12. Shows ran from 11am till midnight.

I was allowed to photograph a single performance but not the live love team. The dancers at The Ramrod were more sexual; they touched themselves and went into the audience to be touched by the customers. They gave the club its reputation. For a small fee you could go to the small dark-room at the back of the theater for an intimate rendezvous with the dancers.

Hombre on East 53rd Street featured four professional dancers six times a day. Costumes ranged from slick black-leather cowboy outfits to an American Indian who danced in a circle of fire. Big Top on Broadway was open 24 hours a day. The club was a huge movie theater with rooms for dancing, eating and swinging.

Chez Elle on East 62nd Street was a refreshing change of pace. The club was for women, and men had to be accompanied to get in. Admission was \$12 with two drinks and a whistle. Vinnie, an actor who had a part in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, played a construction worker on stage. Frank was a model by day and a bespectacled schoolboy by night. The women screamed out innocent advances and blew their whistles. Everyone seemed to be having a wonderful time.



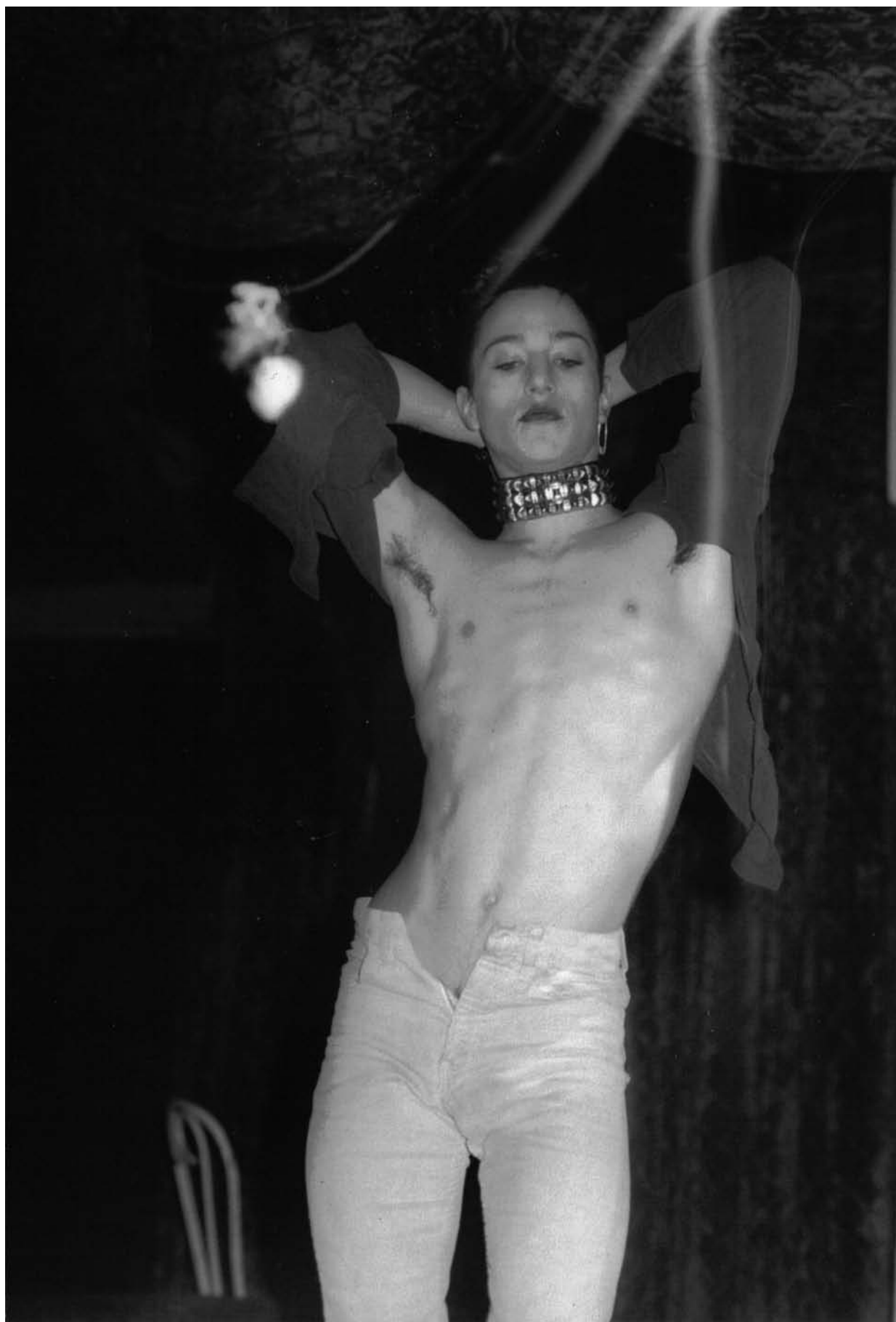
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Vivienne
Maricevic
Robert,
NYC, 1981

20



**Vivienne
Maricevic**
Sweet James,
NYC, 1982



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**Vivienne
Maricevic
Anthony,
NYC, 1982**

Closer To The Sky

G.A.Li

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It was different here at night, tall grass shifting in the shadows and the river rushing in, black and wild before it picked up the glow of the fire. Weekdays hardly anyone else bothered, and Jake liked to ride out with his paints and his brushes, his easel on his back. He'd set up about half a mile down river, usually, but he liked to come up this way sometimes, too. It felt more like home than his apartment, one room over the hardware store in town, dusty books and old photographs, a kitchenette, little notes stuck on random things. Out here there was honey-suckle and clover and flat grey stones in the riverbed, cold beneath his feet.

He hadn't planned on this, on being out here tonight, but someone had pressed a hand-drawn card into his hands at Finn's the night before last, and right after that Tommy had followed him through the parking lot and into his truck, sliding in after him and jerking him off all slow and dirty, murmuring about flyboys and fallen angels and the fiery taste of Mary Lou Miller's pussy, back in the day.

He didn't much care about Mary Lou Miller one way or the other, but he was going to come anyway, Tommy's voice in his ear and Tommy's hand on his cock, his thumb sliding over the slit just right, making his hips buck up hard. He was still trying to catch his breath when Tommy ran his fingers through the spunk on his belly, gathered up as much as he could and used it to jerk himself off, his mouth open and his legs spread wide. There was moonlight shining through the windshield and turning Tommy's skin pale blue, and Jake wouldn't have looked away right then for all the memories in the world.

It seemed fitting that Mary Lou Miller was here tonight, too, smiling and laughing, dark curls loose around her face, dancing up against some boy at the edge of the bonfire's glow. Jake didn't recognize him right off, the slope of his bare shoulders and his khakis hanging low, but he sure looked pretty enough from here. Everyone looked pretty from here. It was the firelight, and the smokeshine. Hazy and sweet, sparks in the air and crushed grass underfoot, Tommy singing softly, strumming his guitar.

Jake made his way towards Tommy roundabout, Sadie Harris's warm hand in his for a while, twirling away and spinning back again, her body soft against his, her earrings sparkling. Jake took the joint from Billy Zee's thick fingers as he passed them by, and Sadie kissed his cheek and danced away, taking Billy with her. Tommy caught his eye and licked his lips, and Jake smiled, looked up at the sky.

Anything was possible on a night like tonight, the river and the fire all mixed up together, homebrew in dark bottles and the stars shining bright. Tommy said, "Sit for a minute," and even now Jake knew how Tommy's minutes turned into hours and he sat anyway, close enough to Tommy to feel the heat of his skin, different from the heat of the fire, Tommy's hair sticking to the nape of his neck, clinging to Jake's hand when he brushed his knuckles over the damp skin. Tommy's heat was like the air and his voice like the smoke, raspy and sweet, curling into Jake when he breathed.

Tommy leaned close and Jake blinked real slow, smiling as Tommy *tsk, tsked* and lifted Billy Zee's joint from his fingers. Jake had turquoise blue paint caked into his cuticles, yellow ochre smudged across his wrist. He had scars he couldn't explain yet, smooth skin that tingled and itched across the front of his shoulder, the back of his thigh, his hip. "These are our friends," Jake said and Tommy nodded, picked out a new rhythm on his guitar.

"You remember this one?" Tommy asked, and Jake hummed a little, shook his head. He did and he didn't.

Tommy's eyes were green and gold and he had freckles all over, the same color as his hair; he liked strawberry ice cream and mayonnaise on his fries, and he could fix anything with a motor, anything at all; there was an unconquered wolf tattooed on his bicep, a burst of red white blue inside his elbow from when he first joined the Guard, a trail of shamrocks on his side that twisted way down low.

Jake had a trail of shamrocks, too. He didn't remember getting them, but he knew they were there, could imagine him and Tommy driving into the city

back before Jake took off for flight school, Tommy's fingers in his hair, his lips kissed dark and swollen, both of them reeking of beer and whiskey and laughing their asses off, toasting the luck of the Irish. Jake imagined that a lot, especially in the shower, his fingers tracing over the shamrocks, thinking about Tommy, the way he'd taste, the way he'd feel, wet and slippery, the way he'd sound with Jake's dick buried deep inside him and his breath caught up in his throat.

Fuck, Jake thought, shifting uncomfortably, his dick hard, trapped between his belly and his briefs. Tommy strummed his guitar and his voice sang out, and Jake tried to think about something else.

"It wasn't like this before," Tommy said softly, setting his guitar aside to run his thumb over Jake's bottom lip and kiss him slow, one hand on the back of Jake's neck holding him close. "With us, I mean. I didn't know if you knew."

Jake closed his eyes, leaned into Tommy's touch. He didn't know what they'd been like before, but from the way his brain filled in the missing pieces he thought he must have wanted Tommy even then, couldn't imagine ever wanting anything else. He remembered Tommy in ways he couldn't explain, details and dreams and fleeting faded images. He felt safer around Tommy than around anyone else, like he was okay again, like Tommy was cool with him even if he wasn't the same guy he'd been before the war. "Does that matter?"

"Not to me," Tommy said, and just then someone threw a log on the fire and the embers popped, sparks flying in the air. One of the girls squealed and out of the corner of his eye Jake could see Billy Zee wrap his big arms around her, could hear her laugh, sweet and high, could hear him laugh, too.

Jake's hands were sweaty, hot on his thighs, and Tommy's eyes were on his, leaning in to kiss him, his fingers spread on Jake's jaw, his throat. Jake's body knew how to do things that Jake didn't remember learning – he could tie a knot in a fishing line without thinking about it, cast out over the water and make the fly dance just so; he could drive his old truck no problem; hell, he could climb into the cockpit of a fighter and fly her just fine, not that anyone would let him. Not anymore.

Tommy bit at Jake's lip, sharp and teasing, soothing the bite with his tongue. Jake heard himself moan and it sounded sexy even to his own ears. His hips pressed closer, Tommy's mouth on his, his hands, the heat in the air and the river rushing by, the scrape of stubble against his throat. Jake's body remembered fucking, and Jake wanted those memories.

He pulled away just enough to see Tommy's eyes, his flushed cheeks, and his smile as he picked up his guitar. It was easy, being here like this, and Jake leaned back and closed his eyes, listened to the night close in around them. Sadie Harris sat down beside him for a

while, ran her fingers through his hair. She stood up to leave, kissed Tommy's cheek and climbed into Billy Zee's arms, and when Jake looked around again it was just him and Tommy, the fire burning low.

"I want you," Jake said, and it was simple enough, Tommy's smile against his, the way his eyes crinkled up at the corners. Jake liked to think he'd been smoother before, had known the right thing to say, to do, but Tommy was smooth enough for the both of them, because Tommy's fingers were curled under the hem of Jake's shirt, dragging over his stomach, his ribs, Tommy's mouth following close behind, hot lick of his tongue, scrape of his teeth, and Jake had meant to be self-conscious about this, about his scars, about his body, about the way the dark head of his dick was already poking out of his jeans, but he couldn't be, not now, not with Tommy leaning right up against him, spreading their shirts out on the grass behind them.

Tommy's dick was hard against Jake's hip, soft denim right there, slick skin everywhere else, his voice raspy in Jake's ear, "So fuckin' hot, you have no idea," and with the way he looked, Jake's back on the grass and Tommy above him, the last of the firelight in his eyes, in his hair, Jake thought he might be right.

"Tommy," Jake breathed, and Tommy kissed his way down Jake's body, his palm pressed over Jake's fly, tongue darting out to taste the slick trail of pre-come on his belly before he wrapped his lips around the head of Jake's dick, hot and wet and Jake couldn't help rocking his hips a little, couldn't help the flex of his fingers on the back of Tommy's neck. "Fuck, Tommy."

"Yeah, later," Tommy said, grinning this wicked little grin, popping open the buttons of Jake's jeans and tugging them off his hips, knuckles sliding over the scars on the back of his thigh, making Jake shiver. Tommy kept one of his hands right there, palm open, fingers splayed wide, and Jake tried not to squirm. Tommy shifted lower, rubbed his cheek on Jake's belly, in the crease of his thigh, stubble scraping over the shamrocks there, his mouth pressed to the lowest one. "You remember these?"

"Luck of the Irish," Jake whispered, and Tommy bit his lip and swallowed hard.

Jake tensed, wondering, but then Tommy just shook his head and laughed, his eyes flashing bright as he licked up the length of Jake's dick and sucked it back down. Jake wanted to flip them over, feel the weight of Tommy's cock in his mouth, nudging at the back of his throat, wanted to taste him there, lower, everywhere, and then Tommy's calloused fingers were in his mouth, earthy and smoke-sweet, then gone way too soon, and Jake could hear himself moaning, needy sounds he couldn't stop, Tommy's fingers circling his hole and pressing in, spitslick and rough, so different from his own.

Jake leaned up on his elbows, scrubbed his hand

through Tommy's hair. "Tommy, fuck, c'mon," and Tommy let Jake's dick slip out his mouth and slap wetly against his belly. Jake was breathing hard and Tommy was, too, his skin flushed and his lips swollen, his fingers in Jake's ass twisting slow. "Christ, were you always this much a tease?"

"Yup," Tommy said, grinning. He still had his jeans on, and that was wrong in ways Jake was too dazed to really think about, but Jake could see how hard he was at least, could see where the head of his cock pressed against the faded denim, leaking. "Been teasin' you for years."

"Yeah?" He wasn't sure if that was true or not, but it didn't matter. This was what mattered, what he had now, what he could touch, taste, remember.

"Sure took you long enough to notice."

"Hard not to, now," Jake said.

He pulled at Tommy's jeans, buttons popping open and Tommy's dick jutting out, shiny at the tip, redgold curls dark around the base. Tommy shifted to his knees, mumbling *sorry, sorry* as he wiped his fingers on their shirts, dug a rubber out his pocket and tore the packet open with his teeth.

Jake reached for it, but Tommy shook his head, rolled it on himself. "Too close," he whispered, leaning in to brush a kiss across Jake's lips, his hips pressing Jake's thighs open, his cock sliding in the hot crease of Jake's ass. "Tell me you're ready."

Jake wrapped his hands around his thighs and hitched them higher, the blunt head of Tommy's dick against his hole, rub of Tommy's hand against his skin guiding it in, thick and hot and bigger than his fingers, better, Tommy's mouth on his, sweat dripping from his forehead, pressing in slow, slow, Tommy's hips twisting, both of them moaning low.

Jake swallowed hard, wished he could see Tommy's cock fucking in and out of him, wished he could see his body stretch to take it, and then Tommy shifted, kneeled up and angled Jake's hips high, and fuck, it was so good like this, the slow burn and the impossible heat, his hips rocking up and up, Tommy's hand wrapped around his dick just right. Jake knew he wasn't going to last, was going to come just like this, too soon, his shoulders pressed into the ground and Tommy's cock in his ass, thrusting deep.

He bit down hard on his lip, on his fingers, but he couldn't stop it, hot splash of come on his belly, his chest, Tommy cursing low and breathless, his voice hoarse and his hips losing their rhythm. "Fuck, Jake, fuck." It still felt so good, so right, fireflies in the tall grass and the stars overhead, slow buzz in his blood and Tommy fucking him hard, leaning over, "Gonna make me come," his mouth pressed against Jake's throat and Jake's fingers twisted in his hair, in the hot well at the base of his spine.

"I missed this, last tour over there," Tommy said later, his dick soft and sticky on Jake's stomach, his

knees tucked up against Jake's ribs. Jake nodded, imagined he probably missed this, too. "We learned to fish right here, back when we were kids," he said, smiling, his fingers tracing the scars on Jake's shoulder, certain, like he was playing his guitar. "You remember?"

Jake shook his head, ran his thumb over Tommy's bottom lip, and Tommy laughed, licked at the rough edges of Jake's nail, the soft pad of his skin. "I just remember you," Jake said, watching Tommy's eyes light up, listening to the river. It was different here at night, Jake thought, but not so different. It still felt more like home than anywhere else. ■

Colin and Gregory: 1956

Jonathan Kemp

When old men hang around public toilets while younger men piss, we aren't out for a glimpse of cock or even a grope. What roots us to the spot is the most profound feeling of envy that we cannot piss like that anymore. It's a mark of respect. When you reach fifty, it trickles.

He pisses like a horse. I can hear him through the whole house. It's not a big house – he calls it the doll's house – but he is forever banging his head on my lampshades and doorjambs, while I totter behind him like a puppy. He strides through my tiny rooms with such confidence and familiarity, as if it were a castle and he its prince; I feel in comparison like the valet who can call nothing here his own.

When I first saw him about a month ago, I thought him quite the handsomest boy I'd seen in a long time. When he removed his clothing, I saw what I had been missing in a model: someone who shone more when they were nude than clothed. Skin with light trapped beneath it. Skin that looked complete rather than exposed. That looked painted, full of colour and life, blood blue and flesh pink. Yellows, purples, whites. Tints I didn't know I could ever reproduce. He is more relaxed when naked, more himself, more at home in his flesh than his clothes. And because of that you don't really notice he is naked.

He has a masculine grace that is best expressed by the word noble. There is something classical about him; his proportion and bearing suggest Michelangelo's *David* come to life, if that doesn't sound too grand. He speaks with the jagged edges of simplicity, and whilst that is not without its charm, it is clear that the sophistication of his being is concentrated on the surface.

I fill acres of paper with his crouched figure, his legs bent and twisted beyond recognition, his spine an abacus, a string of pearls arching impossibly as he nearly swallows himself like Ouroboros. There is nothing that he will not do, no inch of flesh so sacred to him it cannot be splayed and displayed to my gaze. The damp, dark caves of his armpits. The taut plateau of his belly. The smoothed edges of his muscular buttocks, carved to Hellenic perfection. If I placed my tongue there, I should expect them to be cold and

hard as marble. The masculine sweep from his hairline to the right angle of his shoulder as fluid and mesmerising as any waterfall. The line of gravity that runs the length of his torso, from the hollow of his throat to the jewel of his navel, cruciformed by the stigmata of his nut brown nipples. The pucker of his anus like a knot in a tree. How does he feel, spread out before me? How can he not feel shame, I wonder. Yet nothing he does or says suggests he feels it.

After he left today, I walked into the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror, and muttered like an incantation the words "you are old," the distance granted by the second person address in no way diminishing the painful truth of that statement. His presence diminishes me; I am wracked with envy that I am not him. They say desire and identification are almost indistinguishable, but I never understood it till I met him. I stood naked before the mirror, something I have not done since the years of curiosity adolescence entails. I looked at my reflection, at my rounded, narrow shoulders with their tufts of grey hair, my rotund belly, my shrivelled privates, my legs like white sticks, and I felt a deep sadness.

I cannot recall what it felt like to be young. I suppose that is because I was too busy being young to think about it, to store it for future reference. Perhaps that is why, as Wilde said, youth is wasted on the young. Or perhaps because my youth does not in actuality warrant recollection. Perhaps it was a non-event. But I must have been a youth at some stage in my life, all things considered. I must have been in some sense flawless and innocent. Photographs must supply some clue. Another face stares back at me, though, from the few I do possess, never having liked to have my picture taken. I look at a stranger whose passions and fears are irretrievable now. Christ, and I'm only fifty-five.

He came over again today. I should stop saying "he". He has a name. But it is such a grotesque name I fail to link it with him, with his beauty: Gregory. There's no nobility in it, no grace. It sounds like the death rattle of an ancient bullfrog. He told me his friends call him Gore, and since this is the name of a

novelist whose books I enjoy, I feel happier calling him that. Gore has a nobility that more closely matches the patrician stature of his presence.

He's not shy at all and strips off as soon as he's in the studio. Just stands there and disrobes. I usually offer a bathrobe and get them to undress before coming into the studio, but he has none of that. It's as if he can't wait to be naked, as if that is his natural state and wearing clothes an encumbrance. I look at him and praise the good fortune that allows me to witness the sight of him naked. We start off with a few short poses to warm up and then move to longer ones. He does not fidget like some of the models I've had. We chat as I sketch.

His parents are gypsies – or, as he prefers to call them, travelling people. His mother is French and his father Italian, and he is fluent in both languages, as well as English, having been born here – outside Brighton. He left his parents at the age of sixteen and travelled the world on merchant ships, worked in circuses, on building sites, occasionally whoring. I accept this revelation with a worldly nod, as if I meet renters every day, though inside I am shocked and excited. I want to bombard him with questions but beneath his apparent openness he is remarkably guarded.

"Do you find your work interesting?" I say.

He says it gives him plenty of money and sex and saves him from having to work.

He seems to know exactly what he is doing, and why; and I, for one, cannot stand in judgement. I am plagued with questions, having had so little physical pleasure and placed so little value on it. I want to know what it is like to give and take pleasure in that way, to live outside normal society so gleefully and shamelessly. I want to know what it is like to be so fearless.

I ask none of these questions and continue to draw in silence.

"Most of the models who pose for the group do it," he says at last, and I know I am expected to pick this up as a topic of conversation.

"And does it pay well?" I ask.

"I made ten bob from one fella last week."

"He must have been well off."

"A don from Cambridge. You know what he wanted me to do?"

"What?"

"He wanted me to sit down on his face." He is grinning.

"Clothed or unclothed?" I have never spoken of such things with another human being in my life.

"Unclothed. I had to rub my arse in his face while he played with me. And the whole time he's trying to speak, but his words are being muffled by my arse. Then I spilt onto his belly."

I am looking at him by now, my hand stilled, struck dumb by this image he has conjured up. I am

not at all certain what I might say at this point. I am ill-equipped for this.

"It was all over in twenty minutes and he hands me a fiver. That's the most I ever had."

"And will you see him again?" I ask, sounding like a maiden aunt discussing courtship prospects.

"I hope to see him again," he says with a smile that seems to invite something I can barely recognise.

Long after he has gone, I am plagued by the image of him crushing his behind into a man's face. I cannot sleep for imagining it.

Once a month on a Friday afternoon for the past year I have been attending a local life-drawing group run by a friendly old woman with the kind of scatter-brain so characteristic of those members of the aristocracy who have fallen foul of the arts, or "living *la vie de Bohème*," as she puts it. Miss Wilkes is a retired arts mistress from one of the private girls' schools in the Home Counties. She treats us like schoolgirls. There are five of us, all middle-aged men or older, and all, I imagine, of the same persuasion as myself. Maurice wears rouge and calls everybody "dear". Kenneth is a retired navigator from the Royal Navy who stands incredibly close to the male models during the tea break, cornering them so they are obliged to listen to him drone on and on about his life at sea. Malcolm is the most verbally explicit. He has a code for rating the standard of the male models' backsides. The ones he likes best he calls "Harrods". He does tiny, cramped watercolours – two to a page of his small sketch book – and sucks on his paintbrush, making a repulsive sound and ending up with a black tongue. Peter, like me, hardly says a word.

Gore came to model for the group about a month ago. During the tea break I found myself arranging for him to model for me privately. I have done this occasionally with models from the group, though none came more than once or twice. They are unreliable, and not being local boys, are often reluctant to travel so far out of town for so little money.

I had been trying without success to recall who it is Gore reminds me of, for there is something familiar about him I cannot quite place. And it finally came to me today as I was drawing, as I focused on that face and body. He is the spitting image of a young boy I met thirty years ago, under the following circumstances. Since leaving college at twenty one, I worked for four years at an advertising studio in Regent Street run by an acquaintance of my father's – Frank Symonds. On this particular occasion I had been assigned a job that involved drawing the male figure. It was a catalogue of some description, a men's clothing catalogue. During the briefing, Symonds told me he thought I should brush up on my figure drawing. He asked me to stay behind after work, and arranged for a model to come round whom

I was to draw for a couple of hours whilst he did some paperwork.

Trevor was a beautiful young man, tall, broad shouldered, with black hair and green eyes. Symonds took us down to a store room in the basement, where he had set up some angle-poise lamps and cushions. The room was cold. My heart raced at the prospect of this boy disrobing before me, feeling no concern for his possible discomfort, I must admit. Symonds and the lad were clearly familiar, and they joked while Trevor removed his clothes. "I'll try and locate a heater," Symonds said, "otherwise your shivering will be most distracting." Symonds looked at me and said, "Don't worry, it gets bigger," and gave a wink before leaving. It was a side of him I had not seen before, slightly effeminate, repulsive, in thrall to this.

"Where do you want me, guv?"

I found my mouth dry and had to swallow before replying.

"Just stand over there to begin with," I muttered, pointing to a pool of light between the two lamps.

He stood stock still, arms behind his back, legs slightly apart, feet firmly set on the floor, looking into the far left-hand corner behind me.

"This do?"

"Perfect," I stammered, sitting down and grabbing my paper and pencils with sweaty hands.

Symonds came back, carrying a three-bar electric fire, which he plugged into a socket and aimed in Trevor's direction. "This'll ensure it doesn't shrink to nothing, eh, lad?" he chuckled, before turning to me. "Fine figure of a man, isn't he? Such stature. He should be cast in bronze, don't you think?"

"Yes," I said, looking down at the blank sheet on my knee. "Perfect."

Symonds stared openly at the young man's genitals. "Anyway," he chirped, dragging his gaze away reluctantly. "You've got him for two hours, so make the most of him. I'll be upstairs, should you need me."

I don't know whether those first drawings were any good. I'm sure they weren't. I seem to remember spending long stretches of time drinking in that body, my hand making random marks on the paper that bore little resemblance to the vision before me. Every time I looked at him I wanted to thank God for creating such beauty, and for allowing me to witness its sublime splendour.

At one point he got an erection and laughed off an apology.

"No, no, it's fine, don't worry about it," I said breathlessly.

Every evening after work for the next two weeks Symonds would present me with a different boy, but it is Trevor's ash white body and crow black hair, Trevor's pale tan nipples and pale green eyes that are the indelible memory of that time. I never saw him again. I drew ten different young men in as many

days, and yet only that first one registers with me now. The others, beautiful as they were, have faded, so that Trevor's has become the face and body I attribute to each of them. He has, I suppose, delineated my desire.

Looking at Gore this morning was like looking back across the years and seeing Trevor, the same green eyes and boxer's nose, the same angle of the shoulders, even the same pucker to the foreskin, from beneath which that cyclopean eye stares out to assess me like a wary animal.

Gore has done very little "proper" work in his life. A few short-term jobs as an office boy or general dogsbody, work that never lasted; his temperament is such that the minute he felt he'd had enough, he resigned, using the money he had earned to travel. He studied yoga and meditation in Tibet, rope work in North Africa, Noh Theatre in Japan, picked grapes in Italy, smuggled drugs in and out of just about everywhere. He spent an evening with a group of Arabs in the middle of a desert outside Morocco, conversing through the only Arab who spoke French. Having chatted underneath a star-flecked sky on a myriad of topics, smoking hashish and drinking wine with them all evening, he was told they were all about to indulge in a homosexual orgy, and he was welcome to stay or be driven to the nearest town. He chose to stay, of course.

I cannot begin to explain what inadequacies his stories provoke in me, nor what inspiration his very presence works on my art. I feel this peculiar mixture of desire and regret, disgust and fascination, and these feelings seem to spill into the images that appear when I draw. Even as he makes me recognise the narrowness of my life, I feel freer than I have ever felt. There's an urgency in my work that I've never known before, a tension that expresses itself in the most ambiguous and intriguing ways. These new sketches look like nothing I've ever seen.

I remember sitting in my father's library as a small boy and poring over volumes of Hellenic statuary. The eroticism of them was potent to me. I had seen men naked at swim, and relished the furtive sight, but the poetry of the marble was electric. I could openly stare at reproductions of Renaissance paintings and statues for hours, transfixed by something I couldn't quite express, a feeling in the gut that was more than visceral, a humility and awe, a sense of disbelief that human hands were responsible for this divinity of forms. I associated it, when I got older and studied the work of Immanuel Kant, with the notion of the sublime. Something in excess of human understanding. But I also came to recognise its presence in the emotion we call desire – in my experience of desire, at least. I first masturbated over a photograph of Bernini's sculpture of Antaeus and Hercules.

When I was about ten, I took a sheet of paper and a pencil and tried to copy a sketch by Leonardo. It was an appalling scribble, but I started again, and over time, over many weeks, something emerged, some movement of the wrist that enabled me to capture a faint semblance of the original. I did it over and over, till I could draw the thing without looking at the original, by simply concentrating on a point of light that seemed to dance like a star on the tip of the pencil, like a spark created by its contact with the paper. The sketch by Leonardo represented the mus-

culature of a man, and its erotic charge, whilst not something I could in any sense articulate at that age, seems to me now not insignificant. Art gave me the opportunity to feast my eyes on naked men. ■

an extract from Feasting With Panthers.

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Maitreyabandhu Soliloquy For Male Pheasant

The accusation of gaudy is too glib.
It is not preposterous to wear pantaloons
or the red rosettes of victory.
To take pleasure in one's appearance is not effeminacy,
however much the chalks and tepid greys of conventional piety
suggest manners and proper dignity. They can be counterfeited easily.
Obviously it is not a crime to luncheon from the steady
hand of strangers, but to cast doubts on a grand design
is needless snobbery. It barely touches me.
A high-necked purple trimmed with white? A coat of tawny copper
with flashings of lizard green? One must bear it, patiently.
Consider the way I walk across this lawn.
I put one foot in front of the other, methodically.
Stretch my toes, slightly. Then put them back, carefully.
My gravity is thus tintured by my gaiety.
I confess, I am too frequently alarmed. Suffer too readily.
I bend under the yoke of royalty.



37

Dream Makeover

Amber Dawn

38

Let's say there are two kinds of hos. The turn-outs: girls in their early twenties or younger. They pull into the massage parlour parking lot, late for their shift, in their dented sports coops with a nonfat triple caramel macchiato in one hand while they text message their turn-out girlfriends with the other. Turn-outs sleep off their martini and ecstasy hangovers in the staff room. They doze off in impossible positions: their young necks kinked over a sofa's arm, their scrawny legs akimbo.

That used to be me. The only thing that could wake me up was the parlour doorbell. The very second a client came through the door I'd tumble out of slumber, wander into the lobby and line up beside the other girls for hire. "Hi, my name is Donna," I'd yawn. Back then clients didn't mind how bed-headed and bleary-eyed I was: they still chose me. I remember the way the old hos sneered as I counted my makes at the end of the night.

It happened suddenly. It happened without warning. One day I woke up and I was an old ho. Old hos are pushing thirty. Old hos knit booties for their next baby, read distance ed. textbooks and braid one another's hair weaves in between clients. It is the duty of an old ho to keep turn-outs in line. I knew I was passing my prime when I caught myself saying things like, "Coco, you know you can't wear a track-suit to work. I don't care if it's baby phat. Go put your dress on, girl. This here is a business."

Old hos have scars. We tell war stories that make the turn-outs wince and shutter. We're superstitious. Lord knows, I've slipped a little money under the parlour welcome mat as a good-luck offering.

But the greatest sign of aging is when an old ho begins to quietly reflect upon her vocation: the hard times, the high times, the time wasted waiting for tricks, and most of all – what did I do with all that money?

This happened to me in 2004. I'm pretty sure it was 2004, because *The Ricki Lake Show* had long gone into rerun. Daytime television is the quintessential timeline of massage parlours. Talk show topics such as "Who is the Baby Daddy?" and "Surprise, Honey, I'm Really a

Lesbian!" are bigger components of ho lifestyle than blowjobs. Confounded by these shows, we are perpetually ridiculing and relating to the trannies and teen mothers and misfits that they feature.

I became fully conscious of my old ho status while watching an episode called "You Dissed Me, But Look at Me Now: Today's guests are former geeks who have become chic." Before bringing out her guests, Ricki Lake mocked oversize "before" photos of the unfortunate-looking youngsters. Evidently, chic is synonymous with slutty. Braces were replaced by boob jobs. Coke-bottle glasses turned in for contacts and pigtails for manes of bleach-blond hair. Guests flapped around the studio in outfits skimpier than my work lingerie, hell-bent on proving they were no longer losers.

I'll let you in on a secret. My own grade school pictures are as awkward as those on *The Ricki Lake Show*: ill-fitting corduroy hand-me-downs and bowl cut hair. This was almost okay when I was six years old. By junior high, my Sally Anne finds loudly clashed with the masses of polo shirts and penny loafers. In seventh grade, my classmates scratched the words "loser" and "pervert" across my locker. In grade eight, bubble gum was stuck over my face in the class photo that hung in the assembly room. The truth is, I stuck it there. Even I didn't want to see my face. It was easier being a wad of pink gum than my teenage self.

I imagined morphing beneath that bubble gum like a butterfly in a cocoon. One day, I'd peel it off and underneath I'd have the same spiral perm and diamond stud earrings as the popular girls. I grew up in the age of the makeover movie; the meek shall inherit the prom movie. These films taught me that if I hung in there long enough, eventually a cheerleader would take pity on me and teach me how to do my make-up, or a rich prep would lose a bet and have to take me to the spring dance, or I'd discover that I was actually a teenage werewolf who even at 5' 2" was awesome at basketball and all the girls would want to have sex with me.

I clung to the makeover dream for years. My

dream shifted from high school sweetheart to winning big at the ho game. Maybe some dumb regular would buy me a condo or I'd land that mad money stint in Vegas. My "real life" certainly didn't have any *bling blang* makeover potential. I am a poet, a homo with a weakness for broke-ass butch dykes, I dance burlesque – badly. I ought to tattoo the word penniless on my titties and toss in the towel. If I was ever going to go from geek to chic, from trash to cash, I figured ho-ing was the only way. I constantly scanned the adult help-wanted ads for the perfect gig. I chatted online for hours with potential sugar daddies. But even in my final days of sex work, I still hadn't discovered the place where the money was greener.

"Get out of that damn rub and tug," my friend Simone told me.

She was the one working girl I knew who was older than me – and she was a high-priced call girl. A grand a night was her norm and she phoned daily to tell me so. Simone had a much higher work ethic than me. Her clients were B-list actors who wanted to drum her face with their Viagra erections while she recited the lyrics to (no shit) "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald." Whenever her clients requested two girls and I accompanied Simone on these calls, I sped back to the parlour with a newfound appreciation for the meager men flopped atop the massage table.

"Come on. It's not as if you can turn down the cash," Simone would start whining before I had a chance to refuse. "Please."

She did have a pretty "please" and by all accounts, a duo date with Simone should be one of those rare times when I was turned on at work. Simone is so tiny she made me feel like a daddy when I'd sit her on my lap. A wry smoker's laugh frequents her pouty lips. And she fucks women.

But, oh, no – why be attracted to a cute bisexual when I can develop crushes on the worst homophobes at the massage parlour? The hos that made me hot had fistfuls of gold rings and names like Champagne and Brooklyn. Girls who'll knock you flat for no good reason. I've gotten caught ogling these girls from the corner of my eye. They were never flattered: "What up with the side-eye, bitch? You wanna throw down somethin'?"

Yes. Yes I do. I want to throw it down with you right now, I'd think, as I daydreamed of parting their boot-clad legs.

When Simone was naked my brain filled with things like when to book my Pomeranian's appointment at the doggie salon or what vegetables might be ready to rot in my fridge. Her clients always wanted to watch us fuck and we went about it like bad mimes busking in a city park. Our hands squeezed and stroked the air inches away from each other's bodies. We clowned expressions of faux-pleasure.

So when Simone wanted me to see a woman client with her I questioned just how much faking I was capable of. "There's no saying no," snapped Simone, her voice loud and delirious. "This is a once in a motherfucking lifetime date. The client is fame-o-us."

What Hollywood North star sightings had I recently read about in the newspaper? Maybe the *X-Men* sequel was still being shot. "Is it Halle Berry?"

"Nope," said Simone.

"Pamela Anderson is visiting her hometown?"

"Not even close."

"One of the *L-Word* cast wants to find out what lesbian sex is really like?"

Simone clicked her tongue; she was done with my futile guesses.

Even after we arrived at the Downtown Sheridan, after we slipped past the chintz furnished lobby and followed a bellhop up the security-locked elevator, even as we knocked on room number 1608 I had no idea.

Then *she* opened the door.

She opened the door and suddenly a soundtrack was playing – "The Power of Love" by Huey Lewis and the News, The Proclaimers' "500 Miles", Psychedelic Furs, Simple Minds, Echo & The Bunnymen, The Jesus and Mary Chain, old sitcom theme-songs, high school dance songs, slumber party songs – all mashed up into one deafening noise. My entire pubescent life passed before my eyes. I had to blink, breath, pull myself together before I could look this client in the face.

Where had this late 80s/early 90s actress been for the last decade? Cameoing in box office flops I'd never seen? Tucked away in a quaint Swedish village? Rehab? Her once new-wave hair had grown and hung resignedly around her shoulders. No tiara nor neon belt nor slouch socks adorned her body; she wore a white robe. Not the hotel robe, mind you, this was silk and clung to the rounded hips I didn't remember her having in the movies.

I decided then and there that she had come out of hiding for me. She was a good omen, a goldmine, a sip from the fountain of my youth.

My makeover moment had finally arrived.

My greeting came out like a bleating sheep: "hihihihi." Simone stepped on my foot to keep further stupidities from stumbling out. The actress handed me our pay in an unsealed envelope – a classy move that I spoiled by holding it upside down so that the stack of hundred dollar bills slipped out and scattered across the carpet. I hit my head on the cherry wood vanity as I knelt to retrieve the money.

It was up to Simone to infuse any sex appeal into the situation. She miraculously produced a tangerine vanilla scented candle and a bottle of merlot from her purse. Simone made me proud to be an old ho.

I remained jaw-dropped and useless, until a certain silk robe was tossed over the upholstered headboard and the actress lay naked on the bed. I held my breath as I crawled beside this celluloid queen. Her skin did a fine job of imitating the discarded robe. On her, each wrinkle was as crafted as embroidery on silk. I had never seen nipples so pink. They were like the you are here dots on a map. When I touched her, she sighed the kind of sigh only someone who's had vocal coaching could make, like a tuning fork lived in her throat. Her thighs twitched as I arrived at her clit. I wanted to freeze-frame and study her for a while, but Simone had me hand bagged and lubricated faster than I could say "finger bang." We were hos on a clock. Simone was wide-eyed and grave, as if wordlessly urging me to "make haste." "Go bravely forward."

So I did.

As I toyed with the actress's clit, I saw that hardened wad of bubble gum stuck to my eighth grade class photo coming loose. Sliding inside her was like sliding into my past. Not my awkward loser past, but the past I always dreamed of.

I was fucking the prom queen, the rebel girl, the cheerleader and the school slut all at the same time. I made her wriggle and kick. Her head lurched on the pillow. I wondered if she'd squirt or ooze when she came. If she'd scream or if she'd swear. Would a parade of 1987 Chevy El Caminos race down the street below? Would all the mirrored disco balls in the city start spinning? Somewhere a cheerleader would

wave her pompoms high – "Gimme a C. Gimme a U. Gimme an M."

I mused over this pending orgasm for quite a while before I noticed that the actress wasn't having one. My arm was growing tired. I looked over at Simone as she thrummed the client's nipples in a drum-roll of anticipation. "Oh, yeah. That's right," she said, urging the actress to finish. Her tone was the same she took with all the men – a put-on sultriness that thinly disguised her impatience.

The actress's A-note sighs turned to dog-like whimpers. Her brow furrowed. I suspected that if she was going to get off, the moment had already passed – but still I kept fucking her. Simone eyed the time on her watch – and still I kept fucking. I heard the tiny bones in my wrist creaking – I kept fucking. A turn-out would have given up and handed the client a vibrator – but I kept fucking.

The white robe trembled on the clacking headboard like an old ghost, still haunting me. I understood very clearly then that there would be no cum-load of cash or fame. No *Ricky Lake Show*. No free condos. No Viva Las Vegas. I could fuck and fuck and still never satisfy the makeover dream. The bubblegum had already been removed and this is what I am: a queer femme who often has misguided crushes, dances low-rent burlesque in sticky-floored dyke bars and writes goddamned poetry. And what, I asked myself as I pulled out of the famous actress's pussy, is wrong with that? ■

Isabel Gallegymore Tag

After Picasso

When you wake and go to wash
me off you, you'll find
my signature: dark, tangled and dry
in the clean white bath.
From the bathroom window
the tangle is a dove perched on a bull.
The tangle is a woman in a state of anguish
from the bathroom door.
A one line drawing,
a coarse masterpiece
in the clean white bath.
In the clean white bed
I find yours; inoffensive curls
like small engagement rings.

River Wolton Return

I started to run,
 only the barrier left -
 those grumpy Leeds guards
 with fists that spring out to grab every ticket.
 Though I was ready, foreseeing the men at the gate,
 (but still unprepared for her smile as she leant on the wall)
 all the way north I was in and out of the loo, checking my hair,
 her texts in my lap and her name in my mouth, fizzing like kisses.
 The past tapping away: *Are you on the right train?*
 Wakefield slid by and the broken factory backs.
 I reeled myself into her arms,
 hand over hand.

Hand over hand
 I reeled myself into her arms;
 Wakefield slid by and the broken factory backs,
 the past tapping away. 'R U on the right train?' -
 her texts in my lap and her name in my mouth. Fizzing like kisses
 all the way north, I was in and out of the loo, checking my hair,
 but still unprepared for her smile as she leant on the wall,
 though I was ready - foreseeing the men at the gate
 with fists that spring out to grab every ticket
 (those grumpy Leeds guards).
 Only the barrier left.
 I started to run.

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Exuberance is one of the more challenging states to write about. I am particularly struck by this poem's fit of content and form; how the palindrome exquisitely suits the topic and the poet's sensibilities. The structure functions like a fulcrum on which everything – for a shimmering moment – is in balance. The poet evokes engaging details ("in and out of the loo, checking my hair") with which we recognize our own rushing towards. The language vacillates between close to the ground with periodic Romantic flares: the lines move breathlessly. We are reeled into the poem's eager arms, elated by the emblematic gestures that create the lexicon of these lovers ("her text in my lap"). Palindrome comes from the Greek word "running back again" and the poem enacts this. Just as we obsessively review our lover "scenes," the poem is an instant reply of itself and we see how meaning morphs as she nears. Return is intriguingly re. turn. This delightful poem works well on every level. **Betsy Warland, Judge, Poetry Category, 2008**

Sophie Robinson

unspeakable

Your name swallows my lips &
the backward downward rage of all
girls knocking through me, a risk of
speech a risk of love a risk of causing
a scene, zipper of my jeans against
yours & in your ear I hear the sea.

Your name reverses itself on my lips as
I swallow the anger like a little boy, a
battle of the body, a risk of method, the
receipt of love, the cold slither of a fence
against the zipper of my jeans & the
immediacy of your ear against my face.

Your name; the danger of inversion,
swallowing down everyone's rage you
burn & shake beyond yourself you
are the danger of love & you press
your ear against the zipper of my
jeans & say "I can hear the sea."

Your name & mine.

Swallow it down.

We invert girls we slither under
barriers we shock with proximity
we press our ears to the ground
in search of foreign pleasures.

Your name & mine, swallowed
downward in anger. The reversal
of the body, scars where the
danger of love obtained will show,
our fingers in our ears our
hands pressed against our eyes.



Something Outrageous and Verboten

Thomas Glave

Blindness

by José Saramago (Portugal)

This book is utterly riveting (and terrifying), written in a prose that is nearly incantatory at times, with labyrinthine sentences and paragraphs that, while challenging to some readers, always maintain their coherence. I've learned an enormous amount from some of the novel's structural conceits, as well as the way in which Saramago chose to develop and deploy characters.

Notes of a Desolate Man

by Chu T'ien-wen (Taiwan)

This novel's story is truly fascinating, written, like *Blindness* – like each of the books I've listed here – in intricately precise prose. But it's also a magnificent feat of ventriloquistic imagination, narrated in the first-person voice of a brilliant, highly self-conscious, scholarly gay man. (The author is a heterosexual woman.) I always believed in the narrator's character, and felt deeply for him through all his travails – and every so often, to my own fascination, wondered, How on earth did a *heterosexual woman* see so deeply and convincingly into this character's core? I guess she truly *saw* and *felt* him. This novel isn't very well known beyond Taiwan; I'm extremely happy that (by accident) I came across it.

The House of the Spirits

by Isabel Allende (Chile)

It infuriates me when ill-informed people say that Allende has always been a pale imitation of Gabriel García Márquez (as if García Márquez did not himself owe a great deal to Borges!). Her voice is uniquely her own, and this early novel is surely one of her most lyrical and beautiful. I've read the novel several times in English, and have read parts of it in Spanish, and recall that this text is one of the very few that has ever moved me to tears, and lasting sadness, over a character's death. I'm also fascinated with Allende's weaving of mythic-magical elements with harsher, abiding political realities. It took me several readings to realize that the "I" voice that appears in the novel's opening paragraph doesn't reappear in the text in that particular narrative moment until the book's epilogue, some 400 pages later. I would like to achieve some writerly sleight-of-hand like that.

Exile According to Julia

by Gisèle Pineau (Guadeloupe, France)

A friend of mine translated this novel into English from the Creole and French, and introduced me to it. It's a book I've since taught. Pineau opened up worlds to me – principally those of the French Caribbean – that, as an *Anglophone* Caribbean person, I'd not previously known. Simultaneously, she revealed in this novel a Paris I'd never known. Where else had I ever come across such evocative language as an image of the Eiffel Tower "standing on its stiletto heels"? – language that made me see something quite familiar in an entirely new way. I've since read several other of Pineau's novels, and highly recommend all of them; it's also interesting to read her work alongside that of Patrick Chamoiseau from Martinique.

The Carnivorous Lamb

by Agustín Gomez-Arcos (Spain, France)

For me, this novel puts forth one of the *most* strange, unsettling, disturbingly erotic, *subversive* stories I've ever read. I was haunted by the book and its principal characters for weeks after finishing it – powerfully aware of the sadness I'd felt upon finishing it and leaving those marvellous characters behind. This novel offered arresting examples of the possibilities of character *voice* (rivaled in a very different way, for me, by the smooth polyphony of Toni Morrison's *Jazz*); it is narrated by a character whose name one learns only on the novel's final page, but who is deeply central to the story. If I could do one more thing in addition to all else I would like to do, it would be to employ Gomez-Arcos's daring, mordant breeziness, and his lyrically controlled prose to write about something as outrageous and verboten – and affecting – as he did in this novel.

Thomas Glave is the author of *Whose Song? and Other Stories* and the forthcoming *The Torturer's Wife*; the essay collection *Words to Our Now: Imagination and Dissent* (winner of a 2005 Lambda Literary Award); and is editor of the anthology *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* (2008). His fiction and nonfiction have recently appeared in *Callaloo*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *African American Review*, and are forthcoming in *The Massachusetts Review* and *Bloom*. He is 2008-2009 Martin Luther King, Jr., Visiting Professor in the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Cipher

Katherine Evans

pre/face

I am hidden – look closely for me somewhere inside the pattern of the dirtied bus seat fabric. I'm an unimportant calculation in a vast purposeless equation. The city is a conveyor; a large rotating body with an empty void where a heart should be. Mechanical hurrying. Scrolling train windows; pulp newspapers for free, again and again / re-pulp; grubby smeared train windows; infinity coffee cups. All part of an unexplained mathematics. The times flash up on screens then dematerialise, like riddles. This same bus, again and again. Everything inanely repeats – and no answers are needed because there are no questions. I am vanishing under all these mammoth looming billboards. A face the size of a building; up close a blached surface of peeling weathered paper.

The skyline is busy with a muddle of aeries and rusted antennae listening out for secret patterns of the city. Amid the confusion of noise, the hubbub, they are finding hidden, profound meanings. The music of the city quivers up and down their high-tension bodies.

The billboards, the bus numbers, the coffee cups... are they keys to a code?

Wait what about my dreams let me tell you about my dreams.

Zero/Angel

I wish I was immortal, like the neon kebab sign at 3am. But I am bio-degradable: I feel an affinity with chicken-wings, half-eaten chips and ketchup strewn across the pavement at late-night bus stops. I don't know if angels are supposed to wait, but all the same I waited at the bus stop for a fucking long time. Invisible is great – O, anonymity! From the top deck under stark fluorescent light I ride into the night – an omniscient, silent angel. Unfulfilled and searching, migrant angel, pulsating with fluorescent light. An empty beer bottle clatters past on the tilting bus floor.

I have free rein in this city.

This body is roused...

Her small soft breasts harden, galvanised.

Slender-wristed, trembling hands on the nightbus.

The concrete outside the window makes her hard, she feels her burgeoning manhood. On Tube cars she sits with her legs commandingly wide apart, grinding her boot-heels into the floor. She keeps her hair short; haunted and electric, so perhaps she'll stay a eunuch, unhampered and streamlined. Seducing girls with boyish charm, slender hands and pretty eyes. Hopes that narrow hips will make her fast and sleek. Peter Pan/dora, she looks in a box and inside is a boy.

On the train, hanging from the handrail like a gangly lout. Wide eyes lashed in mascara, damp between her legs. He is free, a bachelor. A nobody, strutting, unleashing itself upon the city.

High-speed Barbie

Equipped for adventure, I thrust my hands deep into pockets full of boyhood stuff: apple cores, batteries, conkers and pencils. Matches, keys, credit and debit cards, a nail file, eyeliner, crumpled receipts, small change, mobile, lipstick, travel permit. City map, phone charger, sunglasses. *Is it because Mother let me play with GI Joes when I should've been playing with My Little Pony? I had a pink one that got drafted as a war-horse by the commandoes. My first Barbie got pimped out to the GI Joes. After that, she left and never came back.*

The yearnings of angel head

In the nightclub tonight I scanned the dance-floor for sex. A sky, voyeuristic and floating. My gaze hits the faces of boys and girls. Snake-hipped, capricious: blowing hot then blowing cold then blowing. Romantic, sighing from the corner of the room.

One girl was too soft, she bruised like an overripe pear. When you push, you want to meet with resistance! I couldn't find definition – hers or mine. She reclined and let out small quiet whimpers like a sleeping dog dreaming. Unchallenged, understretched, ductile and wrenching between the sheets. Plastic angel with head. Will she not master me? I wrap my arms around her chest and pull her to me. I get my angel head off.

The other one tried to floor me, urchin limbs akimbo. Filthy banshee hair screaming, I pushed her back by

her sternum. Barbie1 trying to fuck Barbie2. My pubic bone against hers, but no spunk in her. I push my cock-

A Surplus Angel

The City has a poor memory for faces. I should be so familiar! – so synchronised, so accustomed to modes
Of conduct
Of transport

...Who knows your short cuts better than I, a faithful cavalier? Such a portable, durable body. So able to undergo change of form without breaking. You should know me now, greet me by my name.

I, Pod

Through my music goggles I browse the scanning train window. The landscape is refracted through the cold electronic beats. Tower blocks, roads, motorways, office blocks, tenancies, windows. *Mensch-Machine* by Kraftwerk. This is the sound of concrete, of corrugated tin, of glass and bricks. Cold, stiff, powerful. Like a singing power-station. It becomes compulsive, compelling. Now we are listening to *Musique, Non-Stop*.

Repeating.

Unknowable.

Scenery.

Followed by *Neon Licht*; a melancholy paean on a synthesizer; an invocation sung to the electric lights.

soundtrack [sound'trāk']

n. *The narrow strip at one side of a movie film that carries the sound recording.*

The city is a reel of film. I am the margin and I carry the soundtrack. The audio overlays and flattens the images into two-dimensions; blue, austere, apart from me. Looking through my windows: this is reality. All these commuters are extras. I choose the music.

I Am Apocalypse Warrior

Nobody gives a toss, all these blank faces in the carriage. Apocalypse: Nobody's watching anyway; everyone's too immersed in their free newspapers.

Apocalypse as seen through a train window

Pubs along the south bank of the river decimated by some force, office blocks crumbling into the water. You once pressed your forehead like a lover to the sheet glass, the fascia of the beautiful office tower. Now it is falling. City workers out for drinks after work, their pints of beer and glasses of white wine, their cheese-topped nachos; taken victim, wasted in the river.

The devastation is throwing up a cloud of dust, mushrooming in the sky. On a parallel bridge a train coming off its tracks: imagine all those commuters falling about theirs carriages, spilling coffee.

Galvanizer

The landscape pans across the grimy glass of the train window. This city makes me cooler, faster, more resilient. And restless. "*Neon lights, shimmering neon lights...*"

I am galvanic, a stimulant. But the city is so aloof! I dream of being merged with it – or grafted, stuck on like a billboard poster. O, city, integrate me into your debris. I want to be flotsam. Swept up in that speed, that rhythm; adapted and efficient. I feel the fake romance of a shared, mass experience; no narrative.

I dream that together we're all part of the city's circuitry, a wonderful fusion and a shared purpose. We are all electronic, and loved.

The night bus is a submarine passing into the layers of the city. Passing over the skyline, twinkling. Every light left on overnight in an office; every neon light glows for her. And I? I'm an imploding star, phosphorescent for her – and for the city. Blondie plays *Atomic*: "Your hair is beautiful, tonight, Atomic." This city's hair is beautiful, tonight.

Gorgeous Synthesizer Boy

In the basement nightclub he is always there. Sashaying in stilettos on an oversized speaker, sweaty face and chest glittering underneath the disco ball. Submerged in the bass-beat, glazed eyes reflecting the lights. Eyelashes like black frosted spiders, he is unique, he is nobody. I want to fuck him. I want to be him.

We are ciphers in this place; the clothes, the music, the scene. We are neon, cold, stylish, unoriginal, synthetic as the electronic melodies. I am on repeat play. Just as detached, dynamic, and hard as the electro beat. I have synthesised myself from the landscape... Me: a synthetic?

Heroes

Your hair mermaids over me in the underwater dark. So handsome, eases down onto me and presses me with naked weight, urging like a boy. Or like a child, curious. Our roles are unsolvable! Fuck me anyhow, any way you must. Long impish fingers probe and steal over skin, she cocks her wrist. Awe-struck as her breasts hang onto my chest, mascara smudges. Her delicate shoulders, she holds me in the crook of her arm, curved hips knocking against each other, *Take it, take it*. Unloading into me, mascara running. I have your daughter! I lie across her peach ass, her face and chest pillowed, and fill her with my hand. She is my hero; I rescue her. Sentimental twining. You cradle me as you slip through borders into your sleep. Sprawling concrete beach, forsaken landscape. I memorize the angles of your back because every time could be the last. ■

The Truest Way to Name Something

emily m. danforth

It is a small spider, one of those the color of a piece of steel wool after somebody's been scrubbing rust with it. *Burnt Sienna Silver*. The spider has parked itself appropriately inside the tiny viewing window on the parking meter outside the *Corporate Beige* office building. Hannah doesn't notice it until she's already clinked the third quarter into the slot. But then when she does notice, she draws her hand away, though of course there is that little window of glass separating the two of them. She pulls it back anyway, though, just for a moment. She doesn't know how it got in there, but it has spun itself a web up in one corner, so maybe that means it's content. Or stuck. Or both. The spider is small and the window is small and so the web itself is really just the suggestion of a web done in silver silk, or *Abalone Shell*, *Heron Plume*, *Wisp-of-Light*.

But Hannah is late, which is why the parking meter and not her usual space in the big garage two blocks up. No time today, and as such no time to be looking at spiders and webs and so she plunks in five more quarters, the most the meter will allow, four hours of paid parking, and turns the knob to spring-load the little VIOLATION thingamajig. *Violation Vermilion*. *Wronged-Me Red*.

This movement startles the spider. It does its jointy-legged scurry to its web canopy and Hannah thinks it's looking at her with all those eyes spiders are supposed to have. But then she thinks this is a silly thing to think.

Up on the eighth floor of the office building, the Pure Color Paints floor, Richard is wearing his *Mint Julep* tie and his *Turkish Coffee* shoes and he gives Hannah the half-nod when she walks in the break room still in her coat, though it is now well after nine. She gets out her *Quixotic Plum* coffee mug and pours herself a cup from the community pot. She adds two of those little tubs of Hazelnut Non-Dairy Creamer, until the contents match Richard's shoes exactly.

"Amy having trouble this morning?" Richard asks.

She blows on her coffee until it makes a little tide that sloshes the sides of her mug. "Not bad. It was a

never-ending nosebleed again."

"You get it to stop?"

"I think so. It was down to a trickle when I left. I'm gonna go call her right now.," she says.

Richard follows her out into the hallway. "*Head Wound Wine*," he says.

"*Phlebotomist Flourish*," Hannah answers. "Richard, you know anything about spiders?"

"I know I don't like 'em. I wouldn't do the arachnid thing, anyway. People don't want spider shades on their walls, too creepy." Richard side-steps around an administrative assistant in an *Inky Night* suit. "I thought you were off 'Nature's Prism' this go-round."

"Yeah, I am, I'm on 'Culinary Colors' and 'Nantucket Summer'. I just saw this spider and..." They are at the door to her office and Hannah's phone is ringing and it just doesn't seem like that spider is the kind of thing that she should waste any time on so she waves Richard off with a, "I'm sure that's Amy," and steadies the coffee in one hand and opens the door with the other and shoulders the light-switch to the on position and takes in the new stacks, the thick stacks, of file folders heaped on her desk, before picking up the receiver.

It is Amy. The *Blood-Bank-Bag* nosebleed had stopped, for now.

"I'm watching The Home Shopping Network again," Amy tells her. "I'll probably have ordered at least one Tiffany-inspired table lamp and hopefully something with Cubic Zirconia in it before the end of the hour."

"Those are good goals, hon," Hannah says, picturing Amy's too-thin body with its too-visible bones beneath not enough flesh, wrapped up tight in that postage stamp quilt they'd bought at an antique store years ago, back when Amy didn't have a too-thin body but instead a strong one with little calluses on her hands from stripping furniture and those all-muscle legs from riding her bike practically everywhere. In those days it seemed like she was outdoors from April to October, seven to seven, her skin *Beach-Body Brown*, *Creamy Copper*, *Golden Glow*. Now it was *Milky Blue-White* in places, and also

Pallid Pale, Just Jaundice.

"We ladies of leisure do have to keep ourselves entertained," Amy says in that *it's all a big joke, isn't it* voice she's been using for a very, very long time, almost to the day last fall that they had learned that, despite removing half of her stomach, they hadn't gotten it all.

That voice is all hard edges now, like Amy's body, and Hannah hates it almost as much as she hates the cancer itself. "Please eat something when Sarah brings it to you later," she says.

"Oh, are we back to exploiting our lesbian web?" Amy asks.

Hannah thinks of the spider. What will it eat today? Certainly nothing is apt to wander into that sad little web tucked away from the whole of the world. But it got itself in there, surely it can get itself out.

"What is this? Meals-on-Wheels-by-Dykes-on-Bikes?" Amy does her fake laugh and ends it with a real coughing fit.

"Yes, incredibly enough, Amy, our friends, many of whom happen to be lesbians, want to see you. Did you want me to just invite straight people over from now on?" Hannah did not talk this way to her the first go-round, never once, even when she'd wanted to, when it had been too, too much and Amy was so sharp all the time, even then, she'd watched herself, her sarcasm. But now...

"You said she's feeding me," Amy says, her throat still working-out the cough attack.

"Sarah made soup this weekend. This is not a collective effort to feed you. But you should eat it." Hannah pokes at the folders in front of her with the end of a pen in exactly the same way one might poke road-kill.

"I just love how committed all the women are to my cause. I'm like the lesbian charity event of the season."

Hannah sighs. "I have to go, hon; I have a mountain on my desk."

"So go," Amy says.

"I'll call back at lunch," Hannah tells her.

"It's fine, do your work," Amy says, but then adds, "Oh, wait. I have one for you -."

"Yeah."

"*Fungating Wound*," Amy says like a punch line.

Hannah is so, so tired. "Is that a yellow or a green?"

"Let me check my stomach." The quilt rustles against the receiver, a hollow muffled noise. "Both," Amy says.

Pure Color Paints owns Morris-Harris and Hue and True Pigment, which are all house paint manufacturers, and those companies own pieces of others, and those companies pieces of others, and they sell their paints to still others, and so that the eighth-floor

spread of offices with its *New Haven Navy* carpet and its *Stonington Grey* walls has dozens of specialists who have the specific task of naming all of those paint colors. They call them Crayolas in the industry. Hannah has been one for a very long time. And she is one of the best.

Those folders on her desk are filled with 8"x10" swatches of various colors – rich and bright and true colors already determined by some other marketing specialist in some other department to be representative of either the "Culinary Colors" line or the "Nantucket Summer" line. (Though many of these colors are only a fraction of a shade, the difference in the slightest hue, from the colors featured in the "Colonial Revival" line and the "Contemporary Palette" line and that line named after that lady with the DIY home improvement cable show. And some of the colors don't vary at all – they're exactly the same shade. Which is why the names are so important.)

The swatches are made of thick cardstock constructed specifically for Pure Color to resemble the saturation level of common drywall. There are other swatches made to resemble the saturation levels of raw wood, treated house siding, already-painted wood, etc, etc. The backside of each swatch has a series of blank lines numbered 1-6. This is where Hannah does her work. On these six lines Hannah names the colors in her blocky *Crow-Black All-Caps* print.

There is something very dated about this process, and Pure Color knows it, tried, in fact, to go-computer in the early nineties, but the quality of the colors just isn't the same in pixels, even when they spent all that money on those high-resolution monitors a few years back, it just isn't the same thing at all. So it's still the file folders and the swatches.

Hannah puts on a pair of the chunky, rectangular reading glasses she favors, the ones Amy used to tell her make her look "artsy" (and so she's bought dozens) and divides the folders into smaller stacks, then smaller, and decides to start on "Nantucket Summer." She opens the music player on her computer and selects Bette Midler's "Old Cape Cod," puts it on repeat-mode. She chooses one swatch from a file, places it in front of her, and sets her elbows on her desk, ruffling, then smoothing, the back of her short *Smokestack Silver* hair with both hands. The swatch in front of her is a blue. Which, of course, is not nearly enough. She closes her eyes and tries to think of the last time she and Amy went to the beach, which they used to do for weeks at a time in the summer. She tries not to think of Amy now, Amy on the couch. She tries not to think of the spider.

There is some business theory to this process. Pure Color Paints doesn't allow for color names to be more than three words, and they prefer two, and frown on the hyphen, though do allow it occasionally: *Pre-Dawn Sky*. Any of the primary colors, and even their

commonly accepted color wheel counterparts – the secondary oranges and tertiary teals – can be modified, tacked-on-to, gussied up, but too many *Blah-Blah-Yellows* and *This-or-That Reds* in a single collection is also frowned on. The biggest challenge is naming a color in one word, which is, in a way, the truest way to name something, to identify it wholly as one particular thing – but those are also the hardest to get right. Foods and drinks work well, the *Cappuccinos* and *Cabernets* and *Thymes* and *Cheddars*. Hannah did an *Icicle* once that she was proud of, and also a *Burlap*. Almost every collection has a few abstract concepts, which are often found in the pinks and purples for some reason – *Return to Paradise* or *Inspiration* – though not always – *Green With Envy* has been used in a number of lines by a number of companies. Hannah refuses to go this route. Ever. She finds it ridiculous, in fact.

The swatch in front of her has grey tones, though the blue saturation is the heaviest. When Hannah remembers the beach, the beach with Amy, she likes to remember it hot and bright and all-sun and health and not any shade of grey. Which is sentimental, she knows, but they're her memories. From the speakers Bette Midler sings, "If you're fond of sand dunes and salty air..." Hannah can taste the salt on her lips. She almost can. That salty air is hard on things near the beach. It drains their colors. It greys them. Hannah holds up the swatch. She squints at it a moment and then flips it over. She writes:

1. SALT AIR BLUE

It is not her best work, but it's a start. Five more to go. And then another swatch. And then another.

Ten minutes before one o'clock and Richard does a knuckle rap on the *Burnished Metal* doorframe of Hannah's office. She doesn't look up from what she's writing.

"Just a sec," she says, finishing line number six on a rather dirty looking cream swatch. In the previous hours she's done twenty-eight swatches, six names apiece, among them: *Worn Dock*, *Deck Rope*, *Dune Grass*, *Rusty Anchor*, *Sharkskin*, *Sailor's Sky*, *Sand Pail Red* (cheating a bit, that one), *Cape Cod Bay*, *Seaside Pebble*, *Root Beer Float* and *Vanilla Twist*. (She and Amy always had ice cream at the beach, she told herself, and the ice cream shops were always so busy. So those two count, even if they are foods. They're beach foods.)

"You wanna grab something?" Richard asks, as Hannah files the swatch she's just finished with, clicks the mouse to stop Bette mid-word.

"Yeah. Not Chinese. Not tacos, either," she says, removing her glasses and setting them neatly with the five other pairs lined-up at the top of her desk. She moves her neck from side to side, stretching it, hearing it snap like microwave popcorn a couple of times.

"God, I can hear that from over here," Richard says. "I told you I'd give you the number to that back-cracker Sheila goes to."

"Not even one more doctor." Hannah stands up, stretches her arms out behind her and then grabs her jacket. "Not even one."

"You talked to Amy?" Richard asks her in the elevator with the *Grape Juice Stain* carpet and the *Nickel and Ivory* striped wallpaper.

"It stopped bleeding just after I left. I should call her again, though," Hannah says, because she knows she should want to call Amy again, and Richard expects to hear something like that.

"You have your cell phone with you? You can use mine," he says, the elevator opening at the main floor, Richard holding the door, unsure.

"I left it upstairs." Hannah hovers inside the elevator a moment. "It's okay. I'll – I can just call her when we get back," she says, walking out into the lobby in front of him.

"You sure?" He's a few strides behind her, still holding out his *Graphite* phone.

"Yeah. A friend of ours should be with her right now, anyway. Let's just go." She pushes her way through the revolving door and hits the sidewalk before she sees her car there in front of the building, remembers the meter, the spider.

"Oh, fuck it," she says, walking over to the space. "My time's gonna run out any minute."

"Why didn't you park in the garage?" Richard asks her, mining his pockets for change.

"I was late." Hannah cups her hands over the viewing window because the glare from the sun is hitting it in just such a way as to make it impossible to see the time remaining, let alone the spider.

"When aren't you late?" Richard asks, and then says, "I've got one quarter and two dimes. What's that buy us? What are you doing?"

Hannah doesn't answer him. She's squinting, scanning for the spider between those cupped hands. She doesn't think it's there anymore, her nose actually pressed up against the meter, which is cold, and makes her feel very young for just a moment – a squashed nose on a tiny window. But then there is a scuttle of movement inside and Hannah jerks her head back, startled but smiling.

"It's still in there," she says, leaning in close again, but not so close. The spider looks even smaller, crouched as it is beneath its web tarp.

"What the hell? We need to do your office in *Mental Institution Mint*?" Richard always names the psychosis-colors.

"There's a spider trapped inside this thing. Well, I mean, I don't know – I think it's trapped. Maybe it can get itself out. It got itself in, right? But it's got a little web in there and – whatever." Hannah feels suddenly stupid explaining the spider to Richard, and

especially stupid at how happy she is to find him there. "There's twenty-six minutes left. Give me what you've got and I'll get change at lunch."

Richard hands her the coins but is looking at a thin woman in a red trench coat who is clicking past them in heels that she walks very well in. "*Gives-Good-Head Red*," Richard says lowly, his eyes following the woman up the street.

"That's not even the right shade," Hannah tells him, putting in the last dime, patting the viewing pane two pats – one, two – though she isn't sure why and feels silly about it.

Hannah and Richard have named dozens of paint lines during their lunches. These color collections don't come from corporate and they don't end up on cards at hardware stores. They started "The Spectrum of Separation" during Richard's first divorce, a very messy proceeding – *Gavel, Judge's Robe, Lawyer Suit Navy, Lying Whore* (a kind of fuchsia, Richard insisted) – and added more during his second – *Alimony Green, Leather Briefcase, Legal Pad, Bitch* (a red). They've also done "Sex Shades" and "Celebrities" (Hannah did a *Marilyn's Dress* for that one, which she thought was almost perfect) and during election season they do "Primaries for the Primaries" and there's Richard's "Psychosis" line and "Hysterical Teenagers" and "Riding the Greyhound" and just lately they've begun on "The Colors of Cancer."

It started with Hannah describing the after-effects of Amy's first stomach surgery, the sticky fluid she spat up, almost endlessly, into the special jugs the hospital had given them. "It has its own smell and color," she'd told Richard her first week back at the office, glad and terrified to be there.

"Which primary?" Richard had asked.

"Honestly, it can vary dramatically from yellow-green to pinkish-brown."

"So *Stomach Bile*, then?"

"It's not all bile, though. It's because of the cancer, so maybe just *Stomach Cancer Spit-Up*." It felt both bad and good to name it that way. But that's how it had started and they'd just gone on.

When she gets back from lunch, Hannah decides she needs a break from Nantucket, a break from each color named as the link to a specific memory – Amy's cool hands rubbing lotion on her sun-warm back; she and Amy in deck chairs on the porch of the rental cottage at night, Amy reading aloud the way she did, in a sweet, quiet voice that made every word some whisper of magic between just the two of them; Amy kissing her and kissing her with that urgency of hers, after they'd run for cover from a just sprung thunderstorm.

Hannah pulls a couple of cookbooks from the shelves behind her desk. She's got all kinds of inspiration in these shelves, nature pictorials and coffee

table books full of famous artworks and picture books of car parts, of portraits, of the solar system and the ocean floor. She flips a few pages, scans the appetizer section for a while, and opens one of the "Culinary Colors" folders, takes out a swatch. It's easy. Food names are so common among all paint lines: *Maple Sugar, Rosemary Sprig, Caramel, Pumpkin, Roasted Pepper, Kahlúa & Cream, Sesame Seed, Toffee Orange, Margarita, Grain Mustard, Sugar Cookie, Sangria, Dream Whip, Pink-Cream Frosting*. She continues like this for an hour or so before she takes a break, opens another cookbook, scans the soup section.

Soup.

She hasn't called Amy yet. It's now almost four.

She dials while contemplating the next swatch, a yellow.

"Little late for lunch, isn't it?" Amy answers, her voice strained somehow, not quite as it should be.

"Yeah, I know. I'm sorry. I'm so behind, hon," Hannah says.

"Me, too. I'm way behind over here. It's scandalous, actually. I'll probably be fired soon."

Hannah doesn't say anything. She's already said so many times how sorry she is that Amy can't work anymore, can't restore furniture in the carriage house she'd converted into her little business.

Amy says something away from the receiver.

"Somebody there?" Hannah asks, thankful for the change of topic.

"Yeah, Sarah Plain and Tall is still here," Amy says. "She's lingering in a way that makes me claustrophobic, which I've told her ten times or so, but she won't leave," Then she says something else that Hannah can't make out, and then, "She insists on talking to you."

"Put her on then, Amy," Hannah says, but hears the phone being jostled even as she's saying it and knows that she's already talking to Sarah.

"Hannah, listen, I've been wanting to call you since I got here, but Amy..." Sarah starts.

"Does she have a fever?" Hannah asks questions like these in her sleep.

"Yeah, it's 102," Sarah says.

"It is not. It's 100 even," Amy says loud enough for Hannah to make out.

"It's high, Hannah," Sarah keeps on, her voice quieter. and Hannah can tell that she's walking from the living room with the phone. To where? The kitchen, probably – *Ray-O'-Sun* walls with *Egg Cream* trim.

"What else? Did she eat anything?" Hannah asks.

"No, she pretended to, but no. And she's had a nosebleed on and off since I got here."

"Wait, when did you get there?"

"By noon."

"And she already had it then?" Hannah knows even without asking this question that Amy has lied, that the nosebleed had never actually stopped fully

the way she said it had. But Hannah was happy for the few hours the lie bought her, the hours Amy gifted her by telling it, letting the blood continue to run slow in starts and stops, a new dishtowel every half hour or so. But it's been hours now, hours and hours, six quarters in the meter buys four hours of time and then more after lunch, and it's too much blood even in starts and stops.

"She's really, really pale, Hannah. I mean, I've seen her like this before, you know, but she's..." Sarah trails off.

Hannah knows this is where she's supposed to cut in, take charge; this isn't Sarah's job. "You need to take her to the hospital, Sare," Hannah says. "I can meet you guys. I'll leave now."

"I don't think she'll even get in the car with me," Sarah says.

Hannah knows that she's right. And she promised Amy they wouldn't do the ambulance again. She promised.

"Put her on," Hannah says.

"Okay." The phone wires hold all the words between them as Hannah pictures her walking back to the couch.

"It's not even a fraction of a trickle," Amy says.

Hannah tries what she knows won't work. "Will you please go with Sarah to the hospital? Please, Amy, I'll meet you there."

"No. It's not time for that," Amy says.

"Then I'll be there in half an hour. Less. I'll call back from the car," Hannah is already out of her chair, grabbing her coat. "Tell Sarah I'll call back from the car."

"Don't come," Amy says, but Hannah is no longer there.

The parking meter slows Hannah down. The spider is there, in its web now. Waiting. Waiting. There's still over an hour left on it, but what Hannah sees is the time running out, that lever springing forward, maybe jarring the web, maybe whacking the spider, and she just can't leave it like that. She knows that she doesn't have time, but she runs into the deli on the corner, gets quarters, comes back, fills up the meter and makes the clock again read 4:00 in digital *Grey-Black*. And she gets in her car. She buckles her seatbelt. But she can't pull away. She knows that soon it will read 3:59, and then 3:58 and no one will park here later this evening. Sure, maybe for an hour or two, until nine or ten, even, but after that. Nobody. And then what?

"It's a stupid, stupid thing," she says, and hits her palms against the steering wheel. And then undoes her seatbelt and gets out of the car and goes to the meter. One minute is gone, and she puts in another quarter, too much money for one minute. She looks at the spider; it could be content. Maybe it is. Who's

she to say? And she gets back in the car and again fastens her seatbelt and this time she pulls away from the curb, into the street, and sees, in the rear-view, that her spot is scooped up just like that. Another car, four hours gifted on the meter.

It's not necessarily that only one name from lines 1-6 is chosen, and five other names are wasted. Often they don't give the Crayolas each and every shade in a line, but instead they use the names they've come up with for one color, and apply them to a variant of that color. Hannah first noticed this while in the paint section of the building supply store Amy favored. Amy was looking for a certain blue to do the legs of a kitchen table (*Salt Air Blue* would have worked, actually) and Hannah was reading the colors she'd named.

"This will work," Amy had said, a color-card in hand.

Hannah was in the earth-tones with a stack of her own color-cards in hand. She pointed to one of them. "I didn't name this brown *Saddle Soap*. I remember, because I was proud of that name for that brown, but it wasn't this brown."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. Bunches of these aren't exactly the color I named." Hannah felt cheated, somehow, though no one had necessarily told her this wouldn't happen to her names. After all, Pure Color Paints owned them, after all.

Later, Hannah asked about it during a meeting with her supervisor. He was wearing his *Baby Blanket Pink* tie. He told her that they used the names for all sorts of colors in the same family, even in other lines sometimes. This was standard practice. Nothing to worry about, and he'd thought she already knew that, anyway. And Hannah felt silly. She pretended that she'd known all along.

Hannah does call from the parkway and just to fill up the distance between them she tells Amy about the "Nantucket Summer" line, and that leads to beach stories and pretty soon she's talking about the trip they took when they bought that postage stamp quilt, the one Hannah knows Amy is wrapped in now.

"You saw it from the street, remember?" Hannah asks her. "We had both said *no more antiquing* this trip and then you pulled me in there."

"It was all the colors. Little tiny squares of color and you with your new job. I knew you'd want it," Amy says, not in the hard voice.

"I did. I wanted it, but then you'd insisted on haggling with that poor old man. God, I would have just given him whatever it was he was asking and here's my girlfriend giving him a hard time." Hannah laughs so she doesn't cry, remembering how stuffy that store was, how hot the day, Amy in those cut-off shorts she was always in.

"They *want* you to haggle," Amy says, which is what she'd said then. "They overprice stuff so you do. We got it though, didn't we?"

"We did," Hannah says. "And then I made us name the colors the whole ride home. You remember that? I wrote them all down on the back of that Rhode Island map we had in the glove compartment. You remember?" Hannah asks, not sure she can hold it together the way she has to, has to, in order to finish the drive.

"I remember. We named colors for hours," Amy says.

"Some of them were really good," Hannah says. "There were so many of them."

"And all of them were good," Amy tells her.

"Did we keep that map somewhere?" Hannah

asks, thinking it suddenly very, very important that they kept that map.

"We kept the quilt," Amy says.

Hannah can see her exit up ahead. She's nearly there, and she can name the colors, one by one, until she arrives. The maples alongside the parkway haven't turned, yet, but they're almost ready – a branch or two sparked aflame, *Cinnamon Candy Red* and *Maize* and *Orange Ochre* – ready to ignite the whole tree. There's a *Spanish Olive* car in front of her, and an *Iced-Raspberry* car to her left. The sky has a thin rim of *Pepto-Bismol Pink* hovering just above the horizon and then *Watershed Blue* the rest of the way up, stretched and stretched above everything like the domed roof of a snow-globe, holding all the colors, all the colors, waiting to be named. ■

"The Truest Way to Name Something" is a wonderfully accomplished piece of writing that has all the strength and resonance of the short story form at its very best. With the paint industry as its unlikely setting, it is a moving meditation on striving and loss: on the persistence of our need to love, to name and contain; and on the inevitable baffling of those needs by a complex, fragile world. Unpretentious in format, economical in its use of dialogue and detail, and unsentimental in its treatment of illness and grief, this is a powerful, convincing story, and a very worthy winner of the competition. **Sarah Waters and Robert Glück, Judges, Short Story Category, 2008.**

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Rhian Gallagher Nora Reading

She has removed herself as one who reads
removes under a lamp's glow.
Night of her hair, her highlighted cheek
as she leans into the story, her feet drawn up.

Yes, I am watching and listening.
The quiet that is never truly quiet,
close lives and streets,
a helicopter's tracking blades
above, beyond. The room could be

her room in New York equally
as this room in London.
The interior is the discovery
and with the discovery comes the desire
to hold it all in place. This ease
of being with her, that is all
and all and all.



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The Girls
Self Portrait as
Prince William
and Prince Harry

Chroma: Biographies

Sandra Alland is a Scottish-Canadian writer, multimedia artist, performer and activist. Her work has been published and presented across Canada, the US, Mexico, Bermuda, Scotland, England and Spain. She's writing a collection of short stories, and collaborating with Yudnara J in the poetry-music fusion band, Zorras. myspace.com/sandraalland

Lucy Burnett is currently working as a freelance writer in Edinburgh. She has an MA in Creative Writing with Distinction at Bolton University. She is published in *Stand*, *Citizen 32* and was shortlisted for the 2006 *Chroma* Poetry Competition. Her first book is due out next year with Northern House/Carcanet Press.

Philip Byrne lives in West London. After a career in commercial design with an international client list, he decided to retire before the digital age could overtake him and devote his time to painting and drawing. His work is featured in adonisart-gallery.com and with grahamfineart.com.

emily m. danforth earned her MFA in Fiction from the University of Montana and is currently completing her PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her fiction has been seen in *dogwood*, *Willow Springs*, and *971 MENU*, and she received a 2007/2008 Honorable Mention Grant from the *Astraea Foundation for Lesbian Justice* for her novel in progress: *Lucky Human*. Her work also frequently appears on her parents' fridge.

Andrew Darlington has had masses of material published in all manner of strange and obscure places, magazines, websites, anthologies and books. He has also worked as a stand-up poet on the alternative cabaret circuit, and interviewed very many people from the worlds of Literature, SF-Fantasy, Art and Rock-Music for a variety of publications (a selection of his favourite interviews is collected in the recent book *I Was Elvis Presley's Bastard Love-Child*). See more at andrewdarlington.blogspot.com

Amber Dawn is a writer, filmmaker and performance artist based in Vancouver, British Columbia Canada. She is the co-editor of *With a Rough Tongue: Femmes Write Porn* (Arsenal Pulp Press 2005). Her next anthology - a collection of queer women written horror fiction - "*Fist of the Spider Women*" is forthcoming in April 2009 (Arsenal Pulp Press). She is currently a support worker in a progressive, government-funded housing for survival sex workers, and is working on a novel.

James Dufficy lives in London. His work has appeared in *Ambit*, the *Rialto*, and the *London Magazine*. He is currently working on a play about James Abbott McNeill Whistler and his mother.

Katherine Evans is plotting her escape from the world of nine-to-five retail. She is working into the small hours of each night in the hope of gathering together a portfolio of prose and poetry; also printmaking, and writing the odd song - all while battling an addiction to tea and plain chocolate digestives.

Rhian Gallagher returned to New Zealand in 2005, having lived in London for 18 years. Her first collection, *Salt Water Creek* (Enitharmon Press, UK) was short-listed for The Forward Prize for First Collection 2003. She was recipient of the 2008 Janet Frame Literary Trust Award.

Isabel Galleymore is studying English Literature at Reading University and has been published by *The Guardian* and *Pen Pusher*. Most recently Isabel's work has appeared online at *The Cadaverine* as well as in *Brittle Star* magazine, three of her poems have also been recorded for the *PoetCasting* website.

Irras Han is an American based in Geneva. After giving up trying to find a country to call home, she now enjoys the freedom that comes with being rootless. Her poetry has appeared in *Poem Niedergasse*, *Tryst*, *The Ugly Tree*, *Dead Drunk Dublin*, *SOFTBLOW*, *Magma* and others.

Jonathan Kemp writes fiction, drama and literary theory. He teaches creative writing, literature and gender studies at Birkbeck College, London. *Feasting With Panthers* will be published in Autumn 2009. It is his first novel. He also DJs and performs with the Dancing Brodericks, a dada-ist cabaret troupe.

Ricardo Leite graduated from the Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade do Porto in 1999. He also studied in Manchester for a year. In 2000 he had a work exhibited in the BP Portrait competition at The National Portrait Gallery, and was awarded the National Prize for Painting in 2006 by the Centro Nacional de Cultura. He teaches life drawing at the Faculdade de Belas Artes do Porto and Escola Superior Artística do Porto. See more at ricardoleite.net.

GA Li is an aspiring tourist.

Maitreyabandhu lives and works at the London Buddhist Centre. He has been ordained into the Western Buddhist Order for 18 years. He has published a book on friendship, as well as many articles on Buddhism. He won 1st prize in the Manchester Cathedral International Religious Poetry Competition in 2007, and 2nd prize in 2008.

Vivienne Maricevic has been specializing in erotica, sexuality and gender since 1976. She has been published/exhibited worldwide, with series on Male Nudes, Live Sex Shows, Porn Stars, Male Burlesk and Transsexuals. She is a recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Photography and her solo monograph was published by Edition Stemmler in 1995, *Male-to-Female* (La Cage Aux Folles). Her website sheshootsmen.com features photographs from her 2nd monograph in progress. She lives in New York City.

Sophie Mayer has toured with queer superheroes, mailed knickers to the BBC, and - as research for her forthcoming book, *The Cinema of Sally Potter* - perused forty draft screenplays for *Orlando* (including one on a napkin). Her poetry appears in journals in the UK, US, Canada, Australia and cyberspace.

John McCullough's poetry has appeared in *The Rialto*, *The Guardian*, *Ambit* and *London Magazine*. His most recent pamphlet of poems is *The Lives of Ghosts* (Tall-Lighthouse Press). He teaches creative writing at the Open University, the University of Sussex and for Queer Writing South, an organization running workshops for LGBT writers.

Zanele Muholi was born in Umlazi, Durban. She received the 2005 Tollman Award for the Visual Arts, and the first BHP Billiton/Wits University Visual Arts Fellowship in 2006. Her work is included in *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* at the Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College. She is studying for an MFA in Documentary Media at Ryerson University, Toronto, and was Community Relations Officer for the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), a black lesbian organisation she co-founded in South Africa. Zanele Muholi's work appears in *Chroma* courtesy of Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town.

David Porter is a self-taught artist based in South London. In June 2006 he had his first solo exhibition - 25 self-portraits on found wood - at Indo on Whitechapel Road. He has had

work in two short films, one of which was sponsored by Diesel clothing company. He has been involved in numerous group exhibitions at Hackney Empire Hospitality room, Brick Lane Gallery and Second Space Gallery in Shoreditch.

Sophie Robinson is currently undertaking a practice-based PhD in queer poetry and performance at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her work has been included in *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets*, and her first collection, *a*, is coming out from Les Figues Press in April 2009.

Gregory Scott received his MFA in photography from Indiana University. In addition to being a photographer, he is also a painter and a graphic designer and has received national recognition and awards in all three fields. Portfolios of his photographic artwork have been published in *Lenswork* and in the Russian edition of *Esquire*. Most recently he has shown in Germany, Chicago, Boston, and in a solo show in Moscow at the Russian State Library. His work appears courtesy of Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago. See more at gregoryscottimages.com

The Girls are British artists Andrea Blood and Zoë Sinclair, whose award-winning collaboration began in 1996 at Central

Saint Martins. The Girls work is primarily surreal, staged self-portrait photography, which explores the place of women in visual culture. The Girls have exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery, The Photographers' Gallery and the ICA. www.the-girls.co.uk

Betsy Warland has published 10 books of poetry and prose. She is the director of The Writer's Studio at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. A creative writing teacher, editor and a manuscript consultant, Warland has pursued her fascination with the act of writing via her manuscript project *Breathing the Page* – twenty-three essays on writing concepts and materials – to be published in 2010. She is currently working on a prose manuscript *Oscar of Between*. See more at betsywarland.com.

River Wolton is currently Derbyshire Poet Laureate. She works as a writer in schools, libraries and community projects. Her latest publications are *The Purpose of Your Visit* (Smith/Doorstop) and *Some Girls' Mothers* (Route). See more at riverwolton.co.uk



The DIVINE Mentoring Scheme for Emerging Writers

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One of *Chroma's* primary aims is to nurture the next generation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered writers. We want to encourage work that is **daring, inspiring, vital, innovative, necessary and evocative** (DIVINE). Do you have a project that you want to get off the ground? A novel? a collection of poems or short stories? a performance piece?

Chroma editors, along with guest writers, will work with 3 poets and 3 prose writers over a period of 9 months, from March 2009 until November 2009.

Six UK-based writers will be chosen through an open submission process. Writers will need to have a specific project, which they will work with the mentors towards completing. Writers will need to be at a point in their writing career where they are willing to move onto the next stage. The selection panel will also take into account the writer's evident commitment to being an artist (through a record of sending out work to journals and publishers and/or through readings).

Writers will receive individually-tailored tutorials, as we strongly believe each writer has a way of working, as well as a style and a readership, that is unique to them. Writers will have the opportunity to work towards preparing a manuscript for submission to a publisher/agent.

Fee: £550 (bursaries available)

Deadline for applications: 5 January 2009

Please see full details on our website: chromajournal.co.uk/mentoring

Chroma

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